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THE WOOD-RANGERS.

(FROM THE FRENCH OF LUIS DE BELLEMARE.)

BY

CAPTAIN MAYNE REID,

AUTHOR OF "THE SCALP HUNTERS," "OÇEOLA,"
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE WOOD-RANGERS.

CHAPTER I.

LOVE THROUGH THE WINDOW.

For a time the listeners heard nothing beyond those common-place speeches exchanged between lovers, when the young man, doubtful of his position, makes himself heard in reproaches, or arguments, which to him appear all powerful, while the responses which he meets will show too plainly that he is either not loved at all, or that the advantages are on the side of the girl. But was this really the position of Tiburcio with Rosarita? It remains to be known.

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According to the custom of country houses throughout Mexico, the window of Rosarita's chamber was unglazed. Strong iron bars, forming what is called the *reja*, hindered an entrance from without; and behind this reja, lit up by the lamp in the chamber, the young girl was standing in an attitude of graceful ease. In the calm and perfumed night she appeared even more charming than when seen in the brilliant saloon; for it is behind the railing of these balconies that the women of Spanish race appear to the greatest advantage.

A *reboso* of silk was thrown over her head, falling over her shoulders in graceful undulations. The window, running quite down to the level of the floor, concealed nothing of her person; she was visible from the crown of her head to the satin slipper that covered her pretty little foot; and the outline of her figure formed a graceful silhouette against the light burning within.

Tiburcio, his forehead resting against the

bars, appeared to struggle with a painful conviction that was fast forcing itself upon him.

"Ah!" said he, "I have not forgotten, as you, Rosarita, the day when I first saw you in the forest. The twilight was so sombre I could scarce make out your form, which appeared like the graceful shadow of some siren of the woods. Your voice I could hear, and there was something in it that charmed my soul—something I had never heard till that moment."

"I have never forgotten the service you rendered us," said the young girl; "but why recall those times?—they are long past."

"Long past! no, not to me, Rosarita—that scene appears to me as if it had happened yesterday. Yes," continued the young man in a tone of melancholy, "when the light of the camp fire by little and little enabled me to observe the radiant beauty of your face, I can scarce describe the emotion which it gave me."

Had Tiburcio, instead of looking to the ground, but raised his eyes at that moment, he

might have noticed upon the countenance of Rosarita an expression of interest, while a slight blush reddened her cheeks. Perhaps her heart was scarce touched, but rarely does woman listen, without pleasure, to those impassioned tones that speak the praises of her beauty.

Tiburcio continued in a voice still softer and more marked by emotion:—"I have not forgotten the flowers of the lianas which I gathered for you, and that seemed to give forth a sweeter perfume when mingled with the tresses of your hair. Ah! it was a subtle poison that was entering into my heart, and which has resulted in filling it with an incurable passion. Ah! fool that I have been. Is it possible, Rosarita, that you have forgotten those sweet souvenirs upon which I have lived from that day up to the present hour?"

There are certain moments of indiscretion in the life of most women, of which they have a dislike to be reminded. Was it so with Rosarita? She was silent for a while, as if

her rebellious memory could not recall the particulars mentioned by Tiburcio.

"No," at length answered she, in a tone so low as not to betray a slight trembling of her voice, "I do not forget, but we were then only children—to-day—"

"To-day," interrupted Tiburcio in a tone of bitter reproach, "to-day that is all forgotten, since a Senator from Arispe has condescended to comprise you in his projects of ambition."

The melodious voice of Rosarita was now heard in a tone of disdainful anger. Tiburcio had wounded her pride.

"Comprise *me* in his projects of ambition," said she, her beautiful nostrils curving scornfully as she spoke; "and who has told you, señor, that it is not I who condescend?"

"This stranger, too," continued Tiburcio, still preserving his reproachful manner, "this Don Estevan—whom I hate even worse than the Senator—has talked to you of the pleasures of Madrid—of the wonderful countries

that lie beyond the sea—and you wish to see them with your own eyes!"

"Indeed, I acknowlege," answered Rosarita, "that in these deserts life appears to me dull enough. Something tells me that I was not made to die without taking part in those splendours of the world of which I have heard so much. What can you offer to me—to my father—?"

"I understand now," cried Tiburcio, with despairing bitterness; "to be poor, an orphan, unhappy—these are not the titles to win the heart of a woman."

"You are unjust, Tiburcio. It is almost always the very reverse that happens—for it is the instinct of a woman to prefer those who are as you say; but it is different with fathers, who, alas! rarely share this preference with their daughters."

There was in these last words a sort of tacit avowal which Tiburcio evidently did not comprehend, for he continued his reproaches and bitter recriminations, causing the young girl many a sigh as she listened to them.

"Of course you love this Senator," said he. "Do not talk, then, of being compelled.

"Who talks of being compelled?" said Rosarita, hastily interrupting the young man. "I said nothing of compulsion—I only spoke of the desire which my father has already manifested; and against his will, the hopes you may have conceived would be nothing more than chimeras or idle dreams."

"And this will of your father is to throw you into the arms of a ruined prodigal, who has no other aim than to build up the fortune he has squandered in dissipation, and satisfy his ambitious desires! Say, Rosarita, say! is this will in consonance with your own? Does your heart agree to it? If it is not, and there is the least compulsion upon you, how happy should I be to contest for you with this rival. Ah! you do not make answer —you love him, Rosarita? And I—Oh, why did they not leave me to die upon the road?"

At this moment a slight rustling was heard

in the grove of oranges, where Don Estevan and Cuchillo were crouching in concealment.

"Hush!" said the young girl, did you not hear a noise?"

Tiburcio turned himself quickly, his eye on fire, his heart beating joyfully with the hope of having some one upon whom to vent the terrible anger that tortured it—but the rays of the moon shone only upon the silvery foliage—all was quiet around.

He then resumed his gloomy and pensive attitude. Sadness had again taken possession of his soul, through which the quick burst of anger had passed as lightning through a sombre sky.

"Very likely," said he, with a melancholy smile, "it is the spirit of some poor lover who has died from despair."

"Santissima Virgen!" exclaimed Rosarita, making the sign of the cross. "You make me afraid, Tiburcio. Do you believe that one could die of love?" she inquired in a tone of *naïveté*.

"It may be," replied Tiburcio, with a sad smile still playing upon his lips. Then changing his tone, he continued, "Hear me, Rosarita; you are ambitious, you have said so—hear me, then. Supposing I could give you all that has been promised you—hitherto I have preferred to plead the cause of Tiburcio poor and an orphan—I shall now advocate that of Tiburcio Arellanos, on the eve of becoming rich and powerful—noble, too, I shall become, for I shall make myself an illustrious name to offer to you."

As he said these words, the young man raised his eyes towards heaven; his countenance exhibited an altered expression, as if there was revived in his soul the pride of an ancient race.

For the first time since the commencement of the interview, Tiburcio was talking sensibly, and the daughter of Eve appeared to listen with more attention than she had hitherto exhibited.

Meanwhile the two spies were also listening

attentively from their hiding-place among the oranges. Not a word of what was said, not a gesture, escaped them. The last speech of Tiburcio had caused them to exchange a rapid glance. The countenance of the outlaw betrayed an expression of rage mingled with shame. After the impudent manner in which he had boasted of his penetration, he felt confounded in the presence of Don Estevan, whose eyes were fixed upon him with a look of implacable raillery.

"We shall see now," whispered the Spaniard, "whether this young fellow knows no more of the situation of the Golden Valley than he does of the garden of Eden."

Cuchillo quailed under this terrible irony, but made no reply.

As yet Don Estevan had learned nothing new. The essential object with him was to discover whether Tiburcio's passion was reciprocated; the rest was of little importance. In the behaviour of Rosarita there was certainly something that betrayed a tender compassion for

the adopted son of Arellanos; but was this a sign of love? That was the question to which Don Estevan desired to have the answer.

Meanwhile, having excited the evil passions of the outlaw to the highest pitch, he judged it prudent to moderate them again; an explosion at that moment would not have been politic on his part. A murder committed before his face, even though he had not ordered it either by word or gesture, would at least exhibit a certain complicity with the assassin, and deprive him of that authority which he now exercised over Cuchillo.

"Not for your life!" said he, firmly grasping the arm of the outlaw, whose hand rested upon his knife, "Not for your soul's safety. Remember! till I give the word, the life of this young man is sacred. Hush!" he continued, "listen!"—and still holding the outlaw by the arm, he turned his eyes upon Tiburcio, who had again commenced speaking.

"Why should I conceal it from you longer?" exclaimed the young man, in a tone to which the

attentive attitude of Rosarita lent animation. Hear me, then! Honours—riches—power I can lay at your feet, but you alone can enable me to effect this miracle."

Rosarita fixed her eyes upon the speaker with an interrogatory expression.

"Perhaps I should have told you sooner," continued Tiburcio, "that my adopted mother no longer lives—"

"I know it," interrupted the young girl, "you are alone in the world — I heard it this evening from my father."

The voice of Rosarita, in pronouncing these words, was soft as the breeze that sighed through the grove of oranges; and her hand, falling as if by chance into that of Tiburcio, did not appear to shun the pressure given to it.

At sight of this, the hand of Don Estevan gradually relaxed its hold upon the arm of Cuchillo.

"Yes," continued Tiburcio, "my mother died in poverty, though she has left me a valuable inheritance, and at the same time a legacy

of vengeance. True, it is a dangerous secret of which I am the heir, for it has already been death to those who possessed it; nevertheless it will furnish the means to raise myself to an opulence like your own. The vengeance which I have sworn to accomplish must be delayed, but it shall not be forgotten. I shall yet seek the murderer of Arellanos."

At these words Cuchillo turned pale, impatiently grinding his teeth. His arm was no longer restrained, Don Estevan grasped it no more for he saw that the hand of Rosarita was still pressed by that of Tiburcio.

"Hear me further!" continued the young man. "About sixty leagues from here, in the heart of the Indian country, there is a placer of gold of incalculable richness; it was discovered by my adopted father. My mother, on her death-bed, gave me full directions to find the place; and all this gold may be mine, Rosarita, if you will only love me. Without your love, I care nothing for it. What should I do with such riches?"

Tiburcio awaited the answer of Rosarita. That answer fell upon his heart like the tolling of a funeral knell.

"I hope, Tiburcio," said she, with a significant smile, "that this is only a *ruse* on your part to put me to the proof—I hope so, because I do not wish to believe that you have acted so vile a part as to make yourself master of a secret that belongs to another."

"The secret of another!" cried the young man in a voice hoarse with astonishment.

"Yes, a secret which belongs only to Don Estevan. I know it—"

Tiburcio at once fell from the summit of his dreams. So his secret, too, was lost to him, as well as she whom he loved—this secret upon which he had built his sweetest hopes; and to add to the bitterness of his disappointment, she too—for whose sake alone he had valued it—she to accuse him of treason!

"Ah!" cried he, "Don Estevan knows of the Golden Valley? Perhaps then he can tell me who murdered my father! Oh! my God!"

cried he, striking the ground with his heel, "perhaps it was himself!"

"Pray God rather to protect you—you will need all his grace!" cried a rough voice which caused Rosarita to utter a cry of terror as she saw the dark form—that of a man rushing forward and flinging himself upon Tiburcio.

The young man, before he could place himself in an attitude of defence, received a severe wound, and, losing his balance, fell to the ground. The next moment his enemy was over him. For some minutes the two struggled together in silence—nothing was heard but their loud, quick breathing. The knife of Cuchillo, already stained with blood, had escaped from his hand, and lay gleaming upon the ground, without his being able to reach it.

"Now, villain, we are quits," cried Tiburcio, who, with an effort of supreme strength, had got uppermost, and was now kneeling on the breast of the outlaw. "Villain!" repeated he, as he endeavoured

to get hold of his poniard; "you shall die the death of an assassin."

Places had suddenly changed—Tiburcio was now the aggressor; but at this moment a third personage appeared upon the scene. It was Don Estevan.

"Hold!" screamed Rosarita, "hold, for the love of the Holy Virgin! This young man is my father's guest; his life is sacred under our roof."

Don Estevan grasped the arm that was raised to strike Cuchillo, and as Tiburcio turned to see who thus interposed between him and his vengeance, the outlaw glided from under him.

Tiburcio now sprang up, rolled his serape round his left arm, and holding it as a shield, stood with his body inclined backward, his left leg advanced, and his right hand firmly grasping his weapon in the attitude of an ancient gladiator. He appeared for a moment as if choosing upon which of his antagonists he would first launch himself.

"You call this being quits!" cried Cuchillo, his breast still heaving from the pressure of Tiburcio's knee. "Your life belongs to me—I only lent it to you, and I shall now take it back."

"Come on, dog," shouted Tiburcio in answer; "and you too, Don Estevan, you cowardly assassin!—you who pay for the murder of defenceless people."

The countenance of the Spaniard turned livid pale at this unexpected accusation. He instantly drew his dagger, and crying out, "Down with him, Cuchillo!" rushed furiously forward to the attack.

No doubt Tiburcio would soon have succumbed before two such formidable antagonists, but at this moment a red light flashed upon the combatants, as Doña Rosarita, with a flaming torch in her hand, rushed forward between them.

The aspect of Tiburcio, who, despite the odds against him, and the blood that was running from his arm, still fearlessly maintained

his defensive attitude, caused the heart of Rosarita to beat with sympathetic admiration. This sanguinary *denouément* to their interview was pleading the cause of the lover far more eloquently than either his reproaches or promises.

The first impulse of Rosarita was to fling herself into the arms of the young man so daring and beautiful. She was restrained only from following this impulse by a feeling of female delicacy, and for an instant Tiburcio seemed the one about whom she was least concerned.

"Oh! my God!" cried she, "are you wounded? Don Estevan! Señor Cuchillo! Señor Arechiza! retire; for the love of the Virgin, let not the world know that a crime has been committed in our house."

The excited bearing of the young girl, her bosom heaving under the light tissue of her dress, her reboso floating behind her, mingled with the long dark tresses of her dishevelled hair—all these, added to the proud, savage beauty of her countenance, commanded

respect, and as if by enchantment, the weapons of the combatants were restored to their sheaths.

Cuchillo growled like a dog newly muzzled, while Don Estevan preserved a sombre silence. Both walked away from the ground, and their forms were soon lost in the darkness.

Tiburcio, with face upturned, his eyes still flashing with rage, his features illuminated with the red light of the torch, remained for some moments without changing his attitude. His features exhibited that superb expression that danger only magnifies into grandeur. Gradually, however, their tone became softened, and an air of melancholy succeeded it, as his eyes rested upon Rosarita. The young girl had suddenly become pale under the reaction of such vivid emotions, as well as under the influence of the powerful sentiment now rekindled within her heart. Acting under this influence as well, she hastily arranged her scarf, in order to cover her nude shoulders, and the palpitating move-

ments of her bosom. Even her motive for this was misunderstood by Tiburcio.

"Rosarita," he said, speaking with perfect calmness, "I might have doubted your words, but your actions have spoken more plainly. It was to my enemies you first ran; though my blood was spilling, all your fears appeared to be for Don Estevan."

"God knows that I do not deserve this reproach," said the young girl, as with a look of terror she saw the blood streaming to the ground. At the same instant, she advanced to examine the wound.

Tiburcio repulsed her by stepping backward.

"It is too late," said he, with a bitter smile, "the evil is done. Adieu! I have been too longy our guest. The hospitality of your house is fatal to me. Under your roof my life has been threatened, my dearest hopes have been crushed! Adieu, Rosarita! Adieu!"

As he pronounced the last words, he turned and walked hastily away. There was a broken

place in the wall of the enclosure, and towards this he directed his steps. A hundred paces beyond the forest commenced, and the dark sombre trees were visible through the opening. The mysterious light he had already noticed was still glimmering feebly above their tops.

"Where are you going, Tiburcio?" cried the young girl, her hands joined and her eyes filling with tears; "my father's roof will protect you."

Tiburcio only answered by a negative shake of the head.

"But yonder," continued Rosarita, pointing to the woods, "yonder—alone and without defence—danger—death will await you."

"God will send me friends," answered Tiburcio, glancing towards the distant light. "The hospitality of the wandering traveller—a sleep by his camp fire—will be safer for me than that of your father's roof." And Tiburcio continued to advance towards the breach, with a gentle but resolute step.

"For the love of heaven, do not expose yourself to dangers that may perhaps arise when I am no longer present to protect you! I tell you, out yonder you will be risking your life." Then giving to her voice a tone of persuasive softness, she continued, "In what place, Tiburcio, will you be better than with me?"

Tiburcio's resolution was for a moment shaken, and he paused to make answer. "One word, Rosarita," said he; "say that you hate my rival as I hate him—say this, and I remain."

A violent conflict appeared to arise in the breast of Rosarita. Her bosom swelled with conflicting emotions, as she fixed upon Tiburcio a glance of tender reproach, but she remained silent.

To a man at Tiburcio's age, the heart of a woman is a sealed book. Not till we have lost the attractions of youth—so powerful, despite its inexperience—are we able to penetrate the mysteries of the female heart—a sad com-

pensation which God accords to the maturity of age. At thirty years Tiburcio would have remained, but he was yet only twenty-four; he had spent his whole life in the desert, and this was his first love.

"You will not say it? Adieu, then," cried he, "I am no longer your guest," and saying this, he leaped over the broken wall, before the young girl could offer any opposition to his departure.

Stupefied by this unexpected movement, she mounted upon the fragments that lay at the bottom of the wall, and stretching her arms out toward the forest, she cried out, "Tiburcio, Tiburcio! do not leave us so; do you wish to bring upon our house the malediction of heaven?" But her voice was either lost to his ears, or he disdained to reply. She listened a moment, she could hear the sound of his footsteps fast dying in the distance, until they could be heard no more.

"Oh, my God," cried she, falling upon her knees in an attitude of prayer, "protect this

young man from the dangers that threaten him. Oh, God, watch over him, for alas! he carries with him my heart." Then, forgetting in her grief her projects of ambition, the will of her father, all that deceptive confidence, which had kept silent the voice of a love, of the existence of which she was hitherto almost ignorant, the young girl rose hastily from her knees, once more mounted upon the wall, and in a heart-rending voice called out, "*Come back, Tiburcio; come back, I love only you.*" But no answer was returned, and the young girl, wrapping her face in her reboso, sat down and wept.

Before returning to her chamber, she cast one more look in the direction of the forest, but the woods were still enveloped in the obscurity of night; all was sombre and silent, though in the distance the feeble light was still glimmering over the tree-tops. All at once it appeared for an instant to flash more brightly, as if offering a welcome to him who had no longer a home.

CHAPTER II.

AN ABRUPT DEPARTURE.

Don Estevan and Cuchillo, on leaving the ground of the combat, returned to the alley of granadines; but for some time not a word passed between them. Don Estevan was buried in a profound meditation. More skilled than his coarse companion in the mysteries of the female heart, he had divined, before the end of the dialogue between Rosarita and Tiburcio, that the young girl felt for the latter a tender sentiment. It was true it was just germinating in her soul; but the accents of her voice, her gestures, and other signs, discovered to the experienced intelligence of

Don Estevan that she really loved Tiburcio, though herself not yet aware of the extent of that love.

For Tiburcio knowing the secret of the Golden Valley, Don Estevan cared little—that was a matter of secondary importance; but Tiburcio's love, reciprocated by Doña Rosarita, was a very different affair. This at once presented a series of obstacles to the ambitious projects of the Spaniard. Tiburcio then must be got out of the way at all hazards, and at any price. Such are the terrible exigencies of ambition.

It only remained to adopt some plan; but the Spaniard was not then in the spirit to think of one. He was writhing at the inadvertence that had just happened.

"The clumsy fool!" he muttered, but loud enough for his companion to hear him.

"Is it of me your excellency is speaking?" inquired Cuchillo, in a tone that savoured strongly of his usual impudence.

"Who else could I mean, you sot? You

who neither know how to use strength nor stratagem! A woman has accomplished what you could not do! I have told you that this child is a giant to you; and had it not been for me—"

"Had it not been for you," interrupted the outlaw, "this young fellow would not now have been living to trouble us."

"How, sir?" demanded Don Estevan.

"Last night, as I was bringing him to your bivouac, the fellow did an outrage to my honour, and actually threatened me. I was about putting an end to our differences by a shot from my carbine, when your precious old fool of a servant, Benito, came galloping up, and of course I had to renounce my design. So, you see, the only good action I have ever done has brought me to grief. That is the reward of our virtue."

"Speak for yourself, my droll fellow," said the Spaniard, whose pride revolted at being thus classed with such company as the outlaw. "But if that could be outraged

which does not exist, may I ask what attempt this young man made upon your honour?"

"I do not know myself—it was something that happened with my horse, who has the fault—"

Cuchillo interrupted himself, as one who has made an imprudent speech.

"The fault of stumbling in the left fore-leg," added Don Estevan. "I see—this old history of the murder of Arellanos."

"I did not murder him," cried the outlaw, impudently. "I had reasons not to like him; but I pardoned him, for all that."

"Oh, you are so magnanimous! But come, an end to these pleasantries. It remains for you to get this young man out of the way. I have my reasons for wishing it so—among others, he knows our secret. I gave you a half onza to save his life. To-day, I have different views regarding him; and I promise to give you twenty onzas when I am assured that he is no longer alive."

"Agreed, Don Estevan; and in to-morrow's

hunt of these wild horses, it will be strange if Tiburcio Arellanos don't knock his brains out against either a rock or the trunk of a tree, or at least get himself into some corner where he won't be able to find his way out again. The only regret I have is that I shall have to share these twenty onzas with my friends Baraja and Oroche."

"To-morrow!" exclaimed Don Estevan; "and who knows but that to-morrow may be too late? Is the night not better for your purpose? Are you not three to one? Who is to assure you that to-morrow I may not change my mind?"

This threat seriously alarmed Cuchillo.

"Carramba! your excellency is quick to decide; you are not of those who leave for to-morrow what should be done to-day. *Pues*—then—I shall try my best. In fact, it is very quiet here—I wonder the cries of this young woman have not startled the whole house. There's not a creature about."

Such was in reality the case. Notwith-

standing the noise of the struggle between Tiburcio and his assailants, and, later still, the cries of Rosarita, no one had been awakened. The vast extent of the building prevented these sounds from being heard, particularly as all the domestics of the hacienda, as well as the proprietor himself, were buried in a profound slumber.

Cuchillo now directed himself towards the apartment where he had left his comrades, Don Estevan returning at the same time to his own chamber. The moon once more poured her soft silvery light upon the grove of oranges, as if no crime had ever been attempted in that tranquil spot.

Don Estevan did not go to rest, but for a long time paced to and fro across his ample chamber, with the air of one accustomed to watch over ambitious projects while others were asleep.

After a lapse of time, Cuchillo was heard knocking softly at his door; and as soon as it was opened the hired assassin stepped in. His

confused looks caused Don Estevan to tremble. Was the deed already done? He wished it, yet feared to ask the question. Cuchillo relieved him from his embarrassment by speaking first.

"My twenty onzas are gone to the devil!" said he, in a lugubrious tone.

"How?" hastily inquired Don Estevan.

"The bird has flown; the young man is no longer about the place."

"Gone!" exclaimed Don Estevan. "And have you let him escape?"

"How could I hinder him? This brute Baraja, as well as Oroche, were both drunk with mezcal; and Diaz refused to assist me point blank. While I was endeavouring to rouse the other two, the fellow had taken leg bail, through an opening in the wall of the garden—at least that's all we can make out."

"And how have you arrived at this conjecture?" asked Don Estevan, angrily striking the floor with his foot.

"Why, when we arrived at the place, the

Doña Rosarita was clinging over the wall, no doubt guided there by Tiburcio. He could not be far off at the time, for she was still calling upon him to return; and judging by the love-speeches she was making, she must have earnestly desired it."

"She loves him, then?"

"Passionately—or her words and her accents are all deceit. '*Come back!*' she cried, '*Tiburcio, come back! I love only you!*' These were the last words I heard; for shortly after she left the wall, and went back to her room."

"We must to horse and pursue him!" cried Don Estevan, hurrying to make ready; "yes, there is no help for it now. The success of our expedition depends upon the life of this ragged fellow. Go! arouse Benito and the others. Tell them to saddle the horses. Warn your friends in the chamber that we must be *en route* in an hour. Away! while I awake Don Augustin and the Senator."

"Just as I have known him for twenty

years," muttered Cuchillo, as he hastened to his companions, "always awake, always ready for the greatest obstacles. Well, if with his the character he has not made way in his own country, I fear that in Europe perseverance and energy are not worth much."

Don Estevan, as soon as Cuchillo had left him, spent a few minutes in putting himself once more in travelling costume, and then repaired to the chamber of the Senator. He found the door open, as is the custom in a country where people spend most of their lives outside their houses. The moon was beaming full through the large window, and her light illumined the chamber as well as the couch upon which the Senator was sleeping.

"What is it, Don Estevan?" cried the Senator, suddenly leaping up in his bed; "Señor Duke, I should say." Tragaduros had been dreaming of the court of the King of Spain. "What is it, your grace?"

"I come to take leave of you, and to give you my final instructions."

"Eh! what?" said the Senator. "Is the hour late?—or have I been three days asleep?"

"No," gravely replied the Spaniard, "but there is a serious danger that menaces our projects—both yours and mine. This young rustic, whom we found on the road, knows all about the Golden Valley; and what is still worse, he loves Doña Rosarita, and Doña Rosarita loves him."

Tragaduros, instead of starting up at this announcement, sank back upon his pillow, crying out—"Adieu, then, to the million dollars of dowry! Adieu to those beautiful plains covered with horses and cattle, which I already believed my own. Adieu to the honours of the court of King *Carlos el Primero!*"

"Come! all is not yet lost," said Don Estevan. "The evil may be remedied if taken in time. This young fellow has quitted the hacienda. It will be necessary to follow and find him before he gets out of the way. So much the worse for him if his evil star is in opposition to yours."

The Spaniard said no more of his designs with regard to Tiburcio. As to the Senator, it was of little importance to him how he was to be disembarrassed of so dangerous a rival, so long as he himself should not be troubled with the matter.

"Whatever may be the end of it," added Don Estevan, "one thing is certain—the young fellow will never be allowed to come back to the house, for I shall arrange that with Don Augustin. You will therefore be master of the situation, and will have everything your own way. Make the young lady love you—it will be easy enough—your rival will be absent, he may be *dead*—for these deserts are dangerous, and you know the old proverb about absence."

"I shall make myself irresistible!" said the Senator, "for since yesterday I feel as if I was on fire about this lovely creature, who appears to have come down direct from heaven—and then—such a dowry!"

"No man ever aimed at an object more de-

sirable than this immense dowry and this fair flower of the desert. Spare no pains, therefore, to win both the lady and the fortune."

"If necessary, I shall spin for her, as Hercules at the feet of Omphalé."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Spaniard. "If Hercules had any merits in the eyes of Omphalé, it was not on account of his spinning, but because he was Hercules. No—do better than spin. To-morrow Don Augustin has a hunt among his wild steeds; there will be an opportunity for you to distinguish yourself by some daring exploit. Mount one of the wildest of the horses, for the honour of the beautiful eyes of Rosarita, and after having tamed him, ride him up panting into her presence; that will gain you more grace than handling the thread and distaff *à la Hercule*."

The Senator responded to these councils with a sigh; and Don Estevan, having given him further instructions as to how he was to act during the absence of the expedition, took leave of him, and repaired to the chamber of Don Augustin.

The clank of his heavy spurs, as he entered the sleeping-apartment of the haciendado, awoke the latter, who, on opening his eyes and seeing his nocturnal visitor in full riding-costume, cried out—

"What! is it time to set forth upon the chase? I did not know the hour was so late!"

"No, Don Augustin," replied the Spaniard, "but for me the hour has come to set forth upon a more serious pursuit than that of wild horses. I hasten to pursue the enemy of your house—the man who has abused your hospitality, and who, if not captured, may bring ruin upon all our projects."

"The enemy of my house!—the man who has abused my hospitality!" cried the haciendado, starting up in astonishment, and seizing a long Toledo rapier that hung by the side of his bed, "Who is the man that has acted so, Don Estevan?"

"Be calm!" said Don Estevan, smiling inwardly at the contrast exhibited between the spirit of the haciendado and the pusillanimity

of the Senator. "Be calm! the enemy I speak of is no longer under your roof—he has fled beyond the reach of your just vengeance."

"But who is he?" impatiently demanded Don Augustin.

"Tiburcio Arellanos."

"What! Tiburcio Arellanos my enemy! I do not believe it. Loyalty and courage are the characteristics of this young man. I shall never believe him a traitor."

"He knows the situation of the Golden Valley! Furthermore, he loves your daughter."

"Is that all? Why, I was aware of these facts already!"

"Yes, but your daughter loves him—perhaps you were not aware of that fact?"

Don Estevan here detailed the events that had just transpired, and which proved that the passion of the young gambusino was reciprocated by Rosarita.

"Well!" calmly rejoined Don Augustin; "so much the worse for the Senator!"

This reply could not fail to astonish the

Spaniard, and create a feeling of disappointment.

"Remember!" said he, "remember, Don Augustin Peña, that you have engaged your word, not only to me, not only to Tragaduros, but to a prince of the blood royal of Spain, from whose brow this apparently simple incident—the caprice of a young girl—may snatch a crown. Think, too, of your country—its future glory and greatness—all dependent on the promise you have given—"

"Why," interrupted Don Augustin, "why set forth all these considerations? After my promise has been given, I never retract my word. But it is only to the Duke de Armada I have engaged myself, and he alone can free me from this engagement. Are you satisfied with this assurance?"

"How could I be otherwise?" cried the Spaniard, holding out his hand to the noble haciendado. "Enough! I have your word. It will be necessary for me to leave you without further delay. This young fellow may

find comrades to accompany him to the Golden Valley. There is not a moment, therefore, to be lost. I must at once proceed to Tubac. Adieu, my friend, adieu!"

Don Augustin would have risen to accompany his guest to the gates, but the Spaniard would not permit him, and they parted without further ceremony.

When Don Estevan reached the court-yard, his attendants and domestics were found in readiness to depart. The mules were packed, and the *remuda* collected in charge of the driver. The followers, Cuchillo, Baraja, Oroche, and Pedro Diaz, were already in their saddles—the last mounted on a magnificent and fiery steed, which told that the generous haciendado had kept his promise.

CHAPTER III.

THE LONE FIRE IN THE FOREST.

THE motive for this hasty departure from the hacienda was unknown only to Benito and the other domestics. The cavalier adventurers were aware of its object, though two of them, Baraja and Oroche, had no very clear understanding upon the matter. The fumes of the mezcal were still in their heads, and it was with difficulty they could balance themselves in the saddle. They were sensible of their situation, and did their best to conceal it from the eyes of their chief.

"Am I straight in my stirrups?" whispered Oroche, addressing himself to Baraja.

"Straight as a bamboo!" replied the other. "Do I appear firm?" inquired he in turn.

"Firm as a rock," was the response.

Thanks to the efforts they were making to keep themselves upright, Don Estevan, as he glanced over the ranks of his followers, did not observe anything amiss. Cuchillo, however, knowing that they were not in a fit state for inspection, regarded them with an anxious glance.

As Don Estevan was about to mount, the outlaw rode up to him, and pointing to the others with an expressive gesture, said, "If your honour desires me to act as guide, and give the order of march, I am ready to enter upon my duties."

"Very well," replied Don Estevan, springing into the saddle, "commence at any moment, but let us be gone as soon as possible."

"Benito!" shouted the newly-appointed guide, "take the *remuda* and *recua* in advance;

you will wait for us at the bridge of the *Salto de Agua.*"

Benito, with the other attendants, obeyed the order in silence; and the moment after, they were moving, with their respective charges, along the road leading to Tubac. A little later the cavalcade rode out of the court-yard of the hacienda, and, turning round the wall of the enclosure, guided by Cuchillo, proceeded toward the breach through which Tiburcio had passed. The guide was riding by the side of Don Estevan.

"We have found his traces," said he to the chief, as they moved forward; "he is down in the forest."

"Where?"

"Do you see a light yonder, shining through the trees?"

The mysterious light was gleaming just as Tiburcio had first seen it from his window. It was to this that Cuchillo directed the attention of the chief.

"Yes," replied the latter, "what of it?"

"It is the camp-fire of some travellers;

and in all probability the fellow will be found there. So," continued he, with a hideous smile, "we are going to give chase to a wild colt—which will be better than hunting Don Augustin's wild horses—and here are the three hunters."

As the outlaw said this, he pointed with his whip, first to himself, and then to his two comrades, Oroche and Baraja.

"They have both espoused our quarrel," he added.

"From what motive?" inquired the Spaniard.

"That motive which the hound has in taking the part of the hunter against the stag," answered the outlaw, with a significant smile; "they only follow their instincts, and, they are two animals with formidable teeth."

At this moment the moon shone out, and gleaming upon the carbines and knives of the two adventurers, seemed to confirm the assertion of Cuchillo. But the light proved disadvantageous to Baraja and Oroche, for it

enabled Don Estevan to perceive that they were far from steady in their seats.

"Why, these fellows are drunk!" cried he, turning upon the guide a look of furious reproach. "Are these the assistants you count upon?"

"True, your honour," replied Cuchillo. "They are not exactly sober; but I hope soon to cure them. I know of a remedy that will set them all right in five minutes. It is the fruit of the *jocuistle*, which grows abundantly in these parts. I shall find it as soon as we have reached the woods."

"Don Estevan was forced to swallow his chagrin in silence. It was not the time for vain recriminations; and, above all, Tiburcio had first to be found, before the services of either of the inebriated gentlemen would be called into requisition.

In a few seconds' time the party had reached the breach in the wall. Cuchillo dismounted, and, striking a light, pointed out to the others the traces left by Tiburcio. There could be

seen some fragments freshly fallen from the wall, evidently detached by the feet of one passing over; but, what was of more consequence, they were stained with drops of blood. This must have been Tiburcio's.

"You see," said the outlaw to Don Estevan, "that he must have passed this way. Ah! if I had only given him another inch or two. After all," added he, speaking to himself, "it is better I didn't. I shall be twenty onzas the richer that I didn't settle with him then. Now," continued he, once more raising his voice, "where can he have gone, unless to yonder fire in the woods?"

A little farther on in the direction of the forest, other spots of fresh blood were discovered upon the dry calcareous surface of the soil. This appeared to confirm the conjecture of the guide, that Tiburcio had proceeded towards the camp fire.

"If your honour," resumed Cuchillo, addressing himself to his chief, "will go forward in company with the Señor Diaz, you will

reach a stream running upon your left. By following down its bank for some distance, you will come to a bridge constructed with three or four trunks of trees. It is the bridge of the *Salto de Agua.* Just before reaching it, your honour will see a thick wood on the right. Under cover of that you can remain until we three have finished our affair and can rejoin you. Afterwards, we can overtake the domestics. I have ordered them forward, for the reason that such people should not be privy either to our designs or actions."

In this arrangement Cuchillo exhibited the consummate skill of the practised bandit. Don Estevan, without offering any opposition to his plan, rode off, as directed, in company with Diaz; while the outlaw, with his two chosen acolytes, turned their horses' heads in the direction of the fire.

"The fire betokens a halt of travellers, beyond doubt," remarked Diaz to Don Estevan; "but who those travellers can be is a thing that puzzles me."

"Travellers like any others, I suppose," rejoined the Spaniard, with an air of abstraction.

"No, that is not likely. Don Augustin Peña is known for his generous hospitality for twenty leagues around. It is not probable that these travellers should have halted so near his hacienda without knowing it. They must be strangers to the country, I fancy, or if not, they have no good purpose in camping where they are."

Pedro Diaz was making almost the same observations that had occurred to Tiburcio at an earlier hour of the night.

Meanwhile, Cuchillo, with his two comrades, advanced towards the edge of the forest. As soon as they had reached it, the guide dismounted from his horse.

"Stay here," said he, "while I go fetch something to cure you of your ill-timed drunkenness."

So saying, he glided in among the trees, and in a few seconds came out again, carrying with him several oblong yellow-coloured fruits,

that resembled ripe bananas. They were the fruits of the *jocuistle*, a species of *asimina*, whose juice is an infallible remedy against the effects of intoxication. The two inebriates ate of the fruit according to Cuchillo's direction, and in a minute or two their heads were clear of the fumes of the mezcal as if by enchantment.

"Now to business!" cried Cuchillo, without listening to the apologies his comrades were disposed to make, "to business! You will dismount and lead your horses forward by the bridle, until you can see the fire; and when you hear the report of my gun, be ready—for I shall then fall back upon you."

"All right," responded Oroche, "we are both ready—the Señor Baraja and myself—to sacrifice all private interests to the common good."

Cuchillo now parted with the two, leading his horse ahead of them. A little farther on he tied the animal to the branch of a tree, and then, stooping downward, he advanced on foot. Still farther on, he dropped upon his

hands and knees, and crept through the underwood like a jaguar stealing upon its prey.

Now and then he paused and listened. He could hear the distant lowing of the wild bulls, and the crowing of the cocks at the hacienda, mingled with the lugubrious notes of the great wood owl, perched near him upon a branch. He could hear the distant sound of water—the cataract of the *Salto de Agua*—and, in the same direction, the continuous howling of the jackals.

Again the assassin advanced—still creeping as before. Presently he saw before him the open glade, lit up by the flame of the camp-fire. On the edge nearest him, stood a huge button-wood tree, from whose base extended a number of flat ridge-like processes, resembling the bastions of a fortification. He perceived that behind these he would be concealed from the light of the fire, while he himself could command a view of every object within the glade.

In another moment he was crouching under

the trunk of the button-wood. His eyes gleamed with a fierce joy, as he gazed in the direction of the fire, around which he could distinguish the forms of three men—two of them seated, the other stretched along the ground, and apparently asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WOOD-RANGERS.

BEHIND the Hacienda del Venado—that is, to the northward of it — the surface of the country was still in a state of nature. As we have already said, the edge of the forest lay almost within gunshot of the walls; and this vast tract of woods extended for many leagues to the north, till it ended in the great deserts of Tubac.

The only road that trended in a northerly direction, was that running to the Presidio of Tubac—though in reality it was not a road, but simply an Indian trail. At a short distance beyond the hacienda, it was crossed by a tur-

bulent and rapid stream—the same that passed near the house—augmented by several tributaries that joined it in the woods. Where the road crossed it, and for a long distance above and below, this stream partook rather of the nature of a torrent, running in a deep bed, between rocky banks—a *cañon*. Over this cañon the crossing was effected by means of a rude bridge, consisting simply of the trunks of two or three trees laid side by side, and reaching from bank to bank. About half way between the hacienda and this bridge, and but a short distance from the side of the road, was the fire which had already attracted so much attention.

This fire had been kindled near the centre of a little glade, but its flame cast a red glare upon the trees at a distance; until the grey bark of the button-wood, the pale foliage of the acacias, and the scarlet leaves of the sumac, all appeared of one colour; while the darker llianas, stretching from tree to tree, encircled the little glade with a series of festoons.

At the hour when Tiburcio was about leaving the hacienda, two persons were seated by this fire, in the attitude of men who were resting after a day of fatigue. These persons were the trappers, who had already made their appearance at La Poza.

There was nothing remarkable in two men having made their camp-fire in the woods; it was their proximity to a hacienda—and that, too, the Hacienda del Venado, that rendered the fact significant. The trappers knew well enough that the hacienda was close at hand; it followed, then, that they had some reasons of their own for not availing themselves of its hospitality. A large pile of faggots lay near the fire, evidently collected to feed it; and this proved that the men who had kindled it intended to pass the night on the spot.

The appearance of these two men would have been striking, even in the light of day; but under that of the fire it was picturesque—almost fantastic. The older of the two was habited in a costume half Indian, half Cana-

dian; on his head was a sort of bonnet, shaped like a truncated cone, and made out of the skin of a fox; a blue striped cotton shirt covered his shoulders, and beside him, upon the ground, lay a sort of woollen surtout —the *capote* of the Canadians. His legs were encased in leathern leggings, reaching from the thigh downward to the ankle; but instead of mocassins he wore upon his feet a pair of strong iron-bound shoes, capable of lasting him for a couple of years at the least. A large buffalo-horn, suspended from the shoulder, contained his powder; and upon his right side hung a leathern pouch, well filled with bullets. In fine, a long rifle, with a barrel nearly six feet in length, rested near his hand; and this, with a large hunting-knife stuck in his belt, completed his equipment. His hair already showed symptoms of turning grey; and a long scar which crossed his temples, and appeared to run all round his head, showed that if his scalp was still there, he had some time or other run the risk of having it *raised.*

His bronzed complexion denoted a long exposure to sun, wind, and rain; but for all this his countenance shone with an expression of good-humour. This was in conformity with his herculean strength—for nature usually bestows upon these colossal men a large share of kind-heartedness.

The other trapper appeared to be some five or six years younger; and although by no means a man of small stature, he was but a pigmy alongside his gigantic companion. His countenance also lacked the serenity which distinguished that of the other—his black eyes gave out an expression of boldness approaching to effrontery, and the play of his features indicated a man whose passions, fiery by nature, once aroused, would lead him into acts of violence—even of cruelty. Everything about him bespoke the second trapper to be a man of different race from his companion—a man in whose veins ran the hot blood of the south. Although his style of dress did not differ very much from that of his comrade,

there were some points in it that denoted him to be more of a horseman. Nevetheless, his well-worn shoes bore witness to his having made more than one long journey on foot.

The Canadian, half reclining upon the grass, and watching with especial interest a large piece of mutton, which, supported upon a spit of iron-wood, was frizzling and sputtering in the blaze of the fire. He appeared to enjoy the savoury odour that proceeded from the joint; and so much was his attention taken up by his gastronomic zeal, that he scarce listened to what his companion was saying.

"Well, I have often told you," said the latter, "that when one is on the trace of an enemy, whether it be an Indian or a white, one is pretty sure of coming on his tracks somewhere."

"Yes," rejoined the Canadian; "but you forget that we shall just have time to reach Arispe, to receive the pay for our two years' campaign; besides, by our not going to the hacienda, we lose the bounty upon these three skins, and miss selling them besides."

"I never forget my interests," replied the other, "no more than I do the vows which I make; and the best proof of it is, that twenty years ago I made one which I believe I shall now be able to accomplish. We can always force them to pay us what is due at Arispe, and we shall find many an opportunity of getting rid of the skins; but the chance which has turned up in the middle of these deserts—of bringing me in contact with the man against whom I have sworn vengeance—may not offer again during my whole lifetime."

"Bah!" exclaimed the Canadian, "vengeance is like many other kinds of fruit, sweet till you have tasted it, and afterwards bitter as gall."

"For all that, Señor Bois-Rose, you do not appear to practise your own doctrine with the Apaches, Sioux, Crows, and other Indians with whom you are at enmity! Your rifle has cracked many a skull—to say nothing of the warriors you have ripped open with your knife!"

"Oh! that is different, Pepé. Some of these would have robbed me of my peltries—others would have taken my scalp, and came very near doing so, as you see—besides, it is blessed bread to clear the prairies of these red vermin; but I have never sought to revenge myself against one of my own race and colour. I never hated one of my own kind sufficiently to kill him."

"Ah! Bois-Rose, it is just those of one's own race we hate most—that is, when they have given us the reason for doing so—and this man has furnished me with such motives to hate him as can never be forgotten. Twenty years have not blunted my desire for vengeance; though, on account of the great distance that separated us, I supposed I should never find an opportunity of fulfilling my vow. Strange it is that two men, with relations like ours, should turn up together in the middle of these desert plains. Well, strange though it be, I do not intend to let the chance escape me."

Pepé appeared to have fixed his resolution upon this matter, and so firmly that his companion saw the folly of attempting to dissuade him by any further advice. The Canadian, moreover, was of an easy disposition, and readily yielded to the arguments of a friend.

"After all," said he, "perhaps, if I fully understood your motives, I might entirely approve of the resolution you have made."

"I can give them in two words," rejoined he whom the Canadian was addressing as Pepé. "It is just twenty years, as I have already told you, since I was a carabinier in the service of her Catholic Majesty. I should have been contented with my position, and the amount of pay, had it only been *paid*, which unfortunately it was not. We were obliged to do the duty of coast-guard as well, and this would have done well enough had there been any smuggling, with the capture of which we might have indemnified ourselves; but there was none. What a fool a smuggler would have been to have ventured on a coast

guarded by two hundred fellows at their wit's end with hunger! Well, then, I reasoned that if any smuggler was to land it could only be with the concurrence of our captain, and I suspected that the captain would make no objection to such an arrangement—for he himself was, like the rest of us, a creditor of the government. In such case he would cast around among us for the man in whom he *could most* confide, and that would be he who was noted as being most careless upon his post. I resolved, therefore, to become the captain's confidential sentry.

"To arrive at this object, I pretended to be all the day asleep; and, notwithstanding the reprimands I received, I managed also to be found asleep upon my post at all hours of the night. I succeeded in my design. The captain soon learned all about my somnolent habits, and chose me for his favourite sentinel."

At this moment the Canadian detached the mutton from the spit, and having cut a large "hunk" from it with his knife, passed the point to his comrade.

This interrupted the narrative, for both narrator and listener were hungry. The two now sat face to face, their legs forming a sort of ellipse, with the roast mutton in the centre, and for several minutes a formidable gritting of teeth, as huge pieces of the mutton passed through them, was the only sound that broke the stillness of the night.

CHAPTER V.

OLD SOUVENIRS.

"I HAVE said, then," resumed Pepé, after a time, "that I pretended to be always asleep. The *ruse* succeeded equal to my best expectations, and one night the captain sent for me. Good! said I to myself, there's an eel under the stone—the captain is going to confide a post to me. Just as I had anticipated, he sent me to sleep—at least he thought so—on a most important post; but for all that I did not sleep a wink during the whole of that night."

Here Pepé paused for a moment, in order to

swallow an enormous mouthful of the roast mutton, that hindered the free use of the tongue.

"To be brief, then," resumed he, "a boat arrived with men, and I permitted it to land. It was only afterwards that I learnt that it was no smuggling business these men were bent upon, but an affair of blood—of murder; and the thought that I was instrumental in aiding the assassins causes me to this hour a feeling of remorse. I did not conceal what I knew. Afterwards I denounced the murderer, by way of atoning for my fault. A trial took place, but as in Spain justice goes to the highest bidder, the assassin was set free, and I became a victim. I was drummed out of my regiment and transported to the fisheries of Ceuta, on the unhealthy coast of Africa. There I was compelled to remain for many years, till at last, having made my escape, after a thousand perilous adventures, I found myself on the prairies of America."

"It was a rich man, then—some powerful person—whom you denounced?"

"Yes; a grand señor. It was the old story of the pot of clay broken against the pot of iron. But the desert here has no distinctions; and, by the Virgin of Atocha, I shall prove that before many suns have gone over my head. Ah! if I only had here a certain alcalde, of the name of Don Ramon Cohecho, and his damned friend, one Señor Cagatinta, I fancy I should make them pass an uncomfortable quarter of an hour."

"Very well, then," said Bois-Rose, seeing the other had finished his narrative; "very well. I quite approve of your intentions—let the journey to Arispe stand over."

"It is an old story," said Pepé, in conclusion; "and if for ten years you have been teaching me to handle a rifle, after many more spent in the usage of a carabine in the service of her Catholic majesty, surely I should be able to manage it now. I think I would scarcely miss an object as large as him whom you have seen at the head of those horsemen journeying toward the hacienda."

"Yes—yes," replied the Canadian, with a laugh; "but I remember the time, Pepé, when you missed many a buffalo twice as big as he. Nevertheless, I fancy I have made a passable shot of you at last, although you still persist in mistaking the ear of an otter for his eye, which always depreciates the value of the skin. Well, you know that I myself was not brought up on the prairies. I was a sailor for many long years; and perhaps I should have continued one but for—a sad event—a melancholy affair—but what good is there in speaking of that which is no more? Let the past be past. I find the life of the desert something like that on the ocean—once a man has got used to it he cannot easily quit it."

"Yes," rejoined Pepé; "the life of the forest and prairie has its charms, and for my part—"

"Hush!" whispered the Canadian, interrupting the speech of his comrade, and placing himself in an attitude to listen. "I heard a rustle among the branches. Other ears than mine may be listening to you."

Pepé cast a glance in the direction whence the sounds had been heard. The dark form of a man was perceived among the trees, coming from the direction of the hacienda.

It was evident that the man was not trying to approach by stealth, for his form was erect, and he made no attempt to conceal himself among the branches.

This would have freed the mind of Pepé from all suspicion, but for the circumstance that the stranger appeared to be coming direct from the hacienda.

"Who goes there?" he hailed in a loud tone, as the dark shadow was seen entering the glade.

"One who seeks an asylum by your fire," was the ready reply, delivered in rather a feeble voice.

"Shall we allow him to come on—or beg him to continue his journey?" muttered Pepé to the Canadian.

"God forbid we should deny him! Perhaps they have refused him a lodging up at the house; and that voice, which I think I

have heard before, plainly denotes that he is fatigued—perhaps ill."

"Come on, señor" called out Pepé, without hesitating further; "you are welcome to our fire and our mess—come on!"

At this invitation the stranger advanced. It is needless to say that it was Tiburcio Arellanos, whose cheeks, as he came within the light of the fire, betrayed by their paleness the traces of some violent emotion, or else of some terrible malady. This pallor, however, was partly caused by the blood which he had lost in the conflict with Cuchillo.

As soon as the features of Tiburcio came fairly under the light, the trappers recognized him as the young man they had met at La Poza; but the ex-carabinier was struck with some idea which caused him to make an involuntary gesture. The Canadian, on the other hand, regarded the new comer with that expression of condescending kindness which age often bestows upon youth.

"Have you parted with the gentleman in whose company we saw you?" asked Pepé of Tiburcio.

"Yes."

"Perhaps you are not aware that there is a house close by. I do not know the owner, but I fancy he would not refuse you a night's lodging, and he could entertain you better than we. Perhaps," continued he, observing that Tiburcio made no reply, "you have been up to the house already."

"I have," answered Tiburcio. "I have no reproach to make against its owner, Don Augustin Peña; he has not refused me hospitality; but there are other guests under his roof, with whom my life is not safe."

"Oh, that!" exclaimed Pepé, appearing to become more interested; "has anything happened to you?"

Tiburcio lifted his serape, exhibiting the wound in his right arm, from which the blood was yet oozing.

Both Pepé and the Canadian rose hastily to their feet, and stepped forward to examine the wound. Having done so, they immediately set about dressing it, which they effected with

as much dexterity and despatch as might have been shown by practised surgeons; at the same time the rude physiognomy of each was marked by an expression of interest almost amounting to tenderness. While the Canadian kept bathing the wound with water from his canteen, Pepé proceeded into the woods in search of a peculiar plant noted for its healing properties. This plant was the *oregano*. Presently he returned, bringing with him several slices which he had cut from the succulent stem of the plant; the pulp of these, mashed between two stones, was placed over the wound, and then secured by Tiburcio's own scarf of China crape wound several times round the arm: nothing more could be done than await the effect of the application.

"Now," said the Canadian, "you will soon feel better. There is no danger of inflammation—nothing beats the oregano for preventing that, and you need not be afraid of fever. Meanwhile, if you feel inclined, there's a bit of roast mutton and a glass of *eau de vie* at

your service; after which, you had best lie down by the fire and take some sleep—for I can see that you're weary."

"In truth," replied Tiburcio, "I am fatigued. I thank you for your offer, but I do not feel inclined either to eat or drink; I have more need of sleep, and with your permission shall try and get some. One request I would make of you, that you will not permit me to sleep too long; there are reasons why I should soon be awake again."

"Very well," said Pepé; "we don't want your reasons. If you wish us to watch the hacienda, I beg you will only say so, and you shall have two pair of good eyes at your service; therefore make your mind easy, and sleep without fear of any enemy coming upon you unawares."

Tiburcio stretched himself upon the grass, and, overcome by fatigue, and the many violent emotions he had that day experienced, soon fell into a lethargic slumber.

For some time Bois-Rose sat regarding the

sleeper in silence, but with an air of strange interest.

"What age do you think he is?" he at length inquired of his comrade.

"Twenty-four, I should fancy," replied the ex-coastguard.

"Just what I was thinking," said the Canadian, speaking in a tone of half soliloquy, while a melancholy expression appeared to tone down his rude physiognomy. "Yes, just the age he ought to be if still alive."

"He! who are you talking of?" brusquely interrupted his companion, in whose heart the words of the Canadian seemed to find an echo.

"No matter," said Bois-Rose, still speaking in a tone of melancholy; "the past is past; and when it has not been as one would have wished it, it is better forgotten. But come, let us have done with idle regrets and finish our supper—such souvenirs always spoil my appetite."

"The same with me," agreed Pepé, as he seized hold of a large mutton-bone, and com-

menced an attack upon it in a fashion that proved that his appetite was not yet quite gone.

After a while, Pepé again broke the silence.

"If I had the pleasure," said he, "of a personal acquaintance with this Don Augustin Peña, who appears to be the proprietor here, I would compliment him upon the fine quality of his mutton; and if I thought his horses were of as good a sort, I think I should be tempted to borrow one—one horse would never be missed out of the great herds we have seen galloping about, no more than a sheep out of his vast flocks; and to me a good horse would be a treasure."

"Very well," said the Canadian. "If you feel inclined for a horse, you had better have one; it will be no great loss to the owner, and may be useful to us. If you go in search of one, I can keep watch over this young fellow, who sleeps as if he hadn't had a wink for the last month."

"Most probably no one will come after him; nevertheless, Bois-Rose, keep your eye open till

I return. If anything happens, three howls of the coyoté will put me on my guard."

As he said this, Pepé took up a lazo that lay near, and turning his face in the direction in which he was most likely to find a drove of horses, he walked off into the woods.

Bois-Rose was left alone. Having thrown some dry branches upon the fire, in order to produce a more vivid light, he commenced regarding anew the young man who was asleep; but after a while spent in this way he stretched himself alongside the prostrate body, and appeared also to slumber.

The night-breeze caused the foliage to rustle over the heads of these two men, as they lay side by side. Neither had the least suspicion that they were here re-united by strange and providential circumstances—that, twenty years before, they had lain side by side—then lulled to sleep by the sound of the ocean, just as now by the whispering murmurs of the forest.

CHAPTER VI.

BOIS-ROSE AND FABIAN.

For twenty years the murderer of the Countess de Mediana had gone unpunished. For twenty years the justice of heaven had remained suspended; but the time of its accomplishment was not far off. Soon was it to open its solemn assizes; soon would it call together accuser and criminal, witness and judge—not from one part of a country to another, but from opposite sides of the globe; and, as if led by some invisible hand, all would have to obey the terrible summons.

Fabian de Mediana and the Canadian sailor lay side by side—just as they had done twenty

years ago, at three thousand leagues distance from Sonora. And yet they had no suspicion of ever having met before, though a single chance word might, at that moment, have brought either to the memory of the other.

It was just about this time that Don Estevan and his party rode off from the hacienda.

The Canadian, according to the council of his comrade, Pepé, slept with one eye open. At short intervals he contrived to awake himself, and raising his head slightly, cast around him a scrutinizing glance. But, on each of these occasions, the light of the fire showed him Tiburcio still tranquilly asleep; and this appearing to satisfy him, he would again compose himself as before.

About an hour had passed, when the sound of heavy footsteps awakened him once more, and listening a moment, he distinguished them as the hoof-strokes of a horse.

A few moments after, Pepé made his appearance within the circle of the blaze, leading

a horse at the end of his lazo—a magnificent animal, that snorted and started back at sight of the fire. Pepé, however, had already given him more than one lesson, and his obedience was nearly complete; so that, after a short conflict, the trapper succeeded in bringing him nearer, and attaching him to the trunk of a tree.

"Well," said Pepé, wiping the perspiration from his forehead with an old ragged handkerchief, "I've had a tough struggle with him; but he's worth it, I fancy. What think you, Bois-Rose? Isn't he the most splendid quadruped that ever galloped through these woods?"

In truth, it was a beautiful creature, rendered more beautiful by the terror which he was exhibiting at the moment, as he stood with his fine limbs stretched, his head thrown high in air, his mane tossed over his wild savage eyes, and his nostrils spread and frothy. Strange enough that fear, which renders vile and degraded the lord of the creation,

should have an opposite effect on most of the lower animals—especially on the horse. This beautiful creature under its impulse only appears more beautiful.

Little as Bois-Rose delighted in horse-flesh, he could not withhold his approval of the capture which his comrade had made.

"He looks well enough," was his sober reply; "but he'll be a rough mount, I reckon."

"No doubt of that," assented Pepé. "I know he'll be rough at first; but the main thing was to get hold of him. I had a lucky hand to hook him as I did."

"I hope your neck will prove as lucky as your hand. For my part, I'd rather walk ten leagues than be on his back for ten minutes. But see, comrade," continued the big trapper, pointing to the stars, "they're going down yonder! you'll need some sleep before morning. Lie down, while I take my turn of the watch."

"I'll take your advice," replied Pepé, at the same time stretching himself out upon his

back, with his feet to the fire—in which attitude he was soon asleep.

The Canadian rose to his feet, took several turns round the fire—as if to drive away any remains of sleep that might be lurking in his eyes—and then sat down again, with his back resting against the stump of a tree.

He had not been long seated before he got up once more, and, approaching with caution, stooped over Tiburcio. For several minutes he remained in this attitude, attentively examining the features of the young man; he then returned to his seat by the stump.

"Just about *his* age, if he is still living," muttered he to himself. "But what chance have I to recognize in a grown man the features of an infant scarce four years old?"

A smile of disdain played for an instant on his lips, as if he were chiding himself for the silliness of his conjectures.

"And yet," he continued, his countenance changing its expression, "I have seen and taken part in too many strange events—I have

been too long face to face with Nature—to doubt the power of Providence. Why should I consider this a miracle? It was not one when I chanced upon the boat adrift that carried that poor infant and its murdered mother. No, it was the hand of God. Why might not the same hand restore him to me in the midst of the desert? The ways of Providence are inscrutable."

As if this reflection had given birth to new hopes, the Canadian again rose to his feet, and approaching, stooped once more over the prostrate form of Tiburcio."

"How often," said he, "have I thus gazed on my little Fabian as he slept! Well, whoever you are, young man," continued he, "you have not come to my fire without finding a friend. May God do for my poor Fabian what I am disposed to do for you!"

Saying this, he once again returned to his seat, and remained for a long time reflecting upon incidents that had transpired twenty years before in the Bay of Biscay.

It should here be stated that up to this hour Bois-Rose and Pepé had not the slightest suspicion that they had ever met before their chance encounter upon the prairies of America. In reality they had never met—further than that they had been within musket-range of each other. But up to this hour Pepé knew not that his trapping comrade was the gigantic smuggler he had fired at from the beach of Ensenada; and Bois-Rose was equally ignorant that Pepé was the coastguard whose "obstinacy and clumsiness" he had spoken of to his lieutenant.

The cause of this mutual ignorance of each other's past was that neither of them had ever mentioned the word Elanchovi in the hearing of the other. The Canadian had never thought of communicating the incidents of that night to his prairie comrade; and Pepé, on his side, would have given much to have blotted them altogether from the pages of his memory.

The night became more chilly as the hours

passed on, and a damp dew now fell upon the grass and the foliage of the trees. It did not wake the sleepers, however, both of whom required a long rest.

All at once the silence was broken by the horse of Pepé, that neighed loudly and galloped in a circle at the end of his lazo; evidently something had affrighted him.

Bois-Rose suddenly started from his reverie, and crept silently forward, both ear and eye set keenly to reconnoitre. But nothing could be heard or seen that was unusual; and after awhile he glided back to his seat.

The noise had awakened Tiburcio, who, raising himself into a sitting posture, inquired its cause.

"Nothing," answered the trapper, whose denial, however, was scarce sincere. "Something indeed," continued he, "has frightened the horse. A jaguar, I fancy, that scents the skins of his companions, or, more likely, the remains of our roast mutton. By the way, you can eat a bit now; I have kept a couple of pieces for you."

And as he said this, he handed two goodly-sized pieces of the mutton to Tiburcio.

This time the young man accepted the invitation to eat. Rest had given him an appetite; and after swallowing a few mouthfuls of the cold mutton, warmed up by a glass of the brandy already mentioned, he felt both his strength and spirits restored at the same time. His features, too, seemed to have suddenly changed their hue, and now appeared more bright and smiling.

The presence of the hunter also added to the pleasure thus newly arisen within his breast. He remembered the solicitude which the Canadian had exhibited in dressing his wound—which he now extended even to giving him nourishment—and the thought occurred to him that in this man he might find a friend as redoubtable for his Herculean strength as for his dexterity and courage. He no longer felt so lone in the world—so abandoned.

On the other hand, Bois-Rose sat looking at his *protégé*, and apparently delighted to see

him enjoy his repast. The heart of the trapper was fast warming into a strong friendship for this young man.

"Stranger!" said he, after a considerable interval of silence, "it is the custom of the Indians never to inquire the name or quality of a guest until after he has eaten of their bread. I have followed their example in regard to you; and now may I ask you who you are, and what happened at the hacienda to drive you forth from it?"

"I shall willingly tell you," answered Tiburcio. "For reasons that would have no interest for you, I left my hut and started on a journey to the Hacienda del Venado. My horse, overcome by thirst and fatigue, broke down on the way. It was his dead body, as you already know, that attracted the jaguars, so adroitly destroyed by you and your brave comrade."

"Hum!" interrupted the Canadian, with a smile; "a poor feat that—but go on. I long to hear what motive any one could have

for hostility to a mere youth, scarce twenty years old, I should fancy."

"Twenty-four," answered Tiburcio; and then proceeded with his narrative. "I came very near sharing the fate of my poor horse; and when, about two hours after, you saw me at La Poza, I had just arrived there—having been saved by the party in whose company you found me. But what motive those gentlemen could have, first to rescue me from death, and then afterwards attempt to take my life, is what I am unable to comprehend."

"Perhaps some rivalry in love?" suggested the Canadian, with a smile. "It is usually the history of young men."

"I acknowledge," rejoined Tiburcio with an air of embarrassment, "there is something of that; but there is also another motive, I believe. Possibly it is to secure to themselves the sole possession of an important secret which I share with them. Certain it is that there are three men whom my life appears to discommode; there is one of them against whom

I have myself sworn vengeance, and although I am but one against three, I must accomplish the vow which I made at the death-bed of a person who was very dear to me."

The three men whom Tiburcio meant—and whose names he repeated to Bois-Rose—were Cuchillo, who had attempted to assassinate him; the Senator, his rival; and Don Estevan, whom Tiburcio now believed to be the murderer of Marcos Arellanos.

Bois-Rose tacitly applauded this exhibition of youthful ardour and reckless courage.

"But you have not yet told me your name?" said he, interrogatively, after a moment's hesitation.

"Tiburcio Arellanos," was the reply.

At the mention of the name, the Canadian could not restrain a gesture that expressed disappointment. There was nothing in the name to recall the slightest souvenir. He had never heard it before.

The young man, however, observed the gesture.

"You have heard the name before?" he asked abruptly. "Perhaps you knew my father, Marcos Arellanos? He has often been through the wildest parts of the country, where you may have met him. He was the most celebrated gambusino in the province."

Instead of calling Marcos Arellanos his father, had Tiburcio said his *adopted father*, his explanation might have elicited a different response from the Canadian. As it was, he only said in reply—

"It is the first time I have heard the name. It was your face that recalled to me some memories of events that happened—long, long ago——"

Without finishing what he meant to have said, the Canadian relapsed into silence.

Tiburcio, too, ceased speaking for awhile; he was reflecting on some hopes that had suddenly sprung up within him. His meeting with the two trappers appeared to him not so much a mere chance as a providential circumstance. The secret which he possessed, almost

useless to him alone, might be rendered available with the assistance of two auxiliaries such as they—it might become the key to the favour of Don Augustin. It was not without repugnance that he reflected on this means of winning the heart of Rosarita—or rather of purchasing it at the price of gold—for Tiburcio believed that it was closed against any more tender appeal. He had mentally resolved never more to return to the hacienda; but notwithstanding this vow, he still indulged in a slight remnant of hope—the echo of his own profound passion. This hope overcame his repugnance, and he resolved to make known his design to the trappers, and endeavour to obtain assistance in carrying it out.

With this view he again opened the conversation.

"You are a hunter by profession—I think I have heard you say?"

"Yes; that is the vocation both of my comrade and myself."

"It is not a very profitable one, and yet attended with many dangers."

"Ah! it is a noble calling, my boy! My fathers followed it before my time, and I, after a few years of interruption, have resumed the profession of my fathers. Unfortunately I have no son to succeed me; and I can say, without boasting, that when I am gone, a brave and strong race perishes with me."

"I, too," said Tiburcio, "follow the profession of my father—who, as I have told you, was a gambusino."

"Ah! you are one of a race whom God has also created—in order that the gold which He has given to the world should not be lost to the use of man."

"My father," continued Tiburcio, "has left me a grand legacy—the knowledge of a deposit of gold, not far from the frontier; and if two men, such as you and your comrade, would join me in obtaining it, I could promise to make you richer than you ever dreamt of becoming."

Tiburcio awaited the reply of the trapper, feeling almost certain of his adhesion, notwithstanding the refusal the latter had made in his presence to the proposal of Don Estevan. His astonishment, therefore, was great, when the Canadian, with a negative shake of the head, replied as follows:—

"Your proposal, young man, might be seductive to many—there was a time when it would have been so to myself—but now it is no longer so. What would gold be to me? I have no one to whom either to give it or leave it. I have no longer a country. The woods and prairies are my home, and gold would be of no service to me there. I thank you, young friend, for your offer, but I must decline to accept it."

And as he said this, the Canadian covered his face with his huge hand, as if to shut out from his eyes the seductive prospect which had been offered to his view.

"Surely this is not your final answer?" said Tiburcio, as soon as he had recovered

from his surprise. "A man does not so readily refuse a treasure that he has only to pick up from the ground?"

"Nevertheless," responded the trapper, "it is my resolution, fixed and firm. I have other objects to follow. I have given myself, body and soul, to aid my comrade there in an enterprize—my comrade of ten years' standing."

During this conversation, the words *gold* and *treasure*, frequently pronounced, appeared to produce their magic influence on Pepé. Every now and then he turned himself, as if about to protest against the refusal of Bois-Rose, so definitively given. It was evident he was not sleeping very soundly while the talk was going on.

"This Don Estevan de Arechiza of whom you speak," resumed the Canadian, "he is the same we saw at La Poza, is he not—the chief of the expedition?"

"The same."

"Ha! is that the name he goes by here?"

cried Pepé, suddenly rousing himself from his apparent sleep.

"You know him, then?" said Tiburcio, interrogatively.

"Yes—yes," replied Pepé; "he is an old acquaintance, with whom I have some back-debts to settle—and that is why you see me in this part of the country. But if you desire to have the whole story—and from what has happened I fancy you will—I promise to tell it to you by-and-bye. I begin to fancy that our cause is a common one; and if so, I shall be able to lend you a hand. But there's a time for everything; and now, the most important thing for me is to get some sleep, so as to be ready for whatever turns up."

As Pepé said this, he made a movement to return to the horizontal position, from which he had temporarily raised himself.

"Stay, Pepé!" interrupted the Canadian, with an air of good humour; "one instant before you fall asleep, or I shall say that you deserved the name of Pepé the Sleeper. Hear

me! This young man has made us an offer. He wishes us to accompany him to a *placer* he knows of, where you have only to stoop down and gather the gold in handfuls."

"Carramba!" exclaimed Pepé; "you have accepted the offer, of course?"

"On the contrary, I have refused it."

"Then you've done wrong, Bois-Rose! That's a thing that deserves consideration; but we can talk it over by-and-bye—I must have some sleep first." And as he uttered the last words, he lay down again; and the instant after, a loud snore announced that he was soundly asleep.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RECOGNITION.

THE conversation, for a moment interrupted, was resumed by Bois-Rose.

"So you shall find," said he, "in my comrade Pepé, a man ready to join you against this Don Estevan; and, as Pepé's enemies are mine, I shall be equally your partisan. We shall be able to offer you a brace of good rifles, that never miss their aim. There is one, at all events, I think I can answer for."

As the trapper said this, he pointed to the long piece that rested by his side.

Tiburcio cast his eyes upon the gun, and for a moment regarded it with some surprise. He appeared to look more particularly at the

wood-work of the stock, which was notched and carved in a somewhat fantastic manner. Here there was a row of simple notches, and there another row of marks resembling crosses. Then there were rows of double crosses; and also one of triple crosses; and, finally, a series of stars. All these hieroglyphics appeared to have been cut with the blade of a knife; but their purpose was a puzzle to Tiburcio.

Bois-Rose, noticing an interrogative expression upon the face of the young man, at once entered upon an explanation.

"These marks," said he, "are the scores I keep of the savages that have fallen by my rifle. They themselves keep count by the number of scalps; but this, you see, is more Christian and decent. That row of crosses stands for Apaches—there is a dozen in all. The double crosses are for Sioux—seven of them. Those with the triple branch are Pawnees—eight of them I have sent to the land of spirits. The stars are Crows—and number only four, that my rifle has caused to

utter their death-yell. You see nine parallel notches?—well, these are nine Flatheads that, thanks to me, will rob no longer in this world; and, finally, those marks of a roundish shape, which I needn't count, are so many Blackfeet, who have gone to their happy hunting-grounds. Now," added the trapper, "I think I can promise you a rifle that is not likely to miss fire, and the hand of a friend that will not fail you."

And as he said this, he stretched forth his huge hand, and, grasping that of Tiburcio, pressed it frankly and firmly.

The young man accepted the offer with a profusion of thanks.

"I had a presentiment," said he, "when I saw the light of your fire, that I should find friends around it."

"You are not deceived," warmly responded Bois-Rose; "you have found friends;—but, pardon me when I ask you, have you no relatives or connexions with whom you could find a home?"

For a moment, the colour mounted to the cheeks of Tiburcio; but after a slight hesitation, he replied:—

"Why should I not be frank with you?—I shall. Know then, brave trappers, that, surrounded as I am by enemies who seek my life—disdained by the woman I have loved, and still love—I am alone in the world; I have neither father nor mother, nor any relative that I know of."

"Your father and mother—are they dead?" inquired Bois-Rose, with an air of interest.

"I never knew either of them," answered the young man, in a sad voice.

"You have never known them!" cried the Canadian, rising suddenly, and laying hold of a blazing fagot, which he held up to the face of Tiburcio.

This fagot, light as it was, appeared as if a hundredweight in the hand of the giant, that trembled like an aspen, under the convulsive emotions that were agitating his bosom. He held the flame close to the countenance of

the young man, and scanned his features with eager anxiety.

"But surely," said he, "you at least know in what country you were born?"

"I do not," answered Tiburcio. "But why do you ask me? What interest—"

"Fabian, Fabian!" interrupted Bois-Rose, in a soft, appealing tone, as if he was speaking to an infant—"what has become of you?"

"Fabian!" repeated the young man; "I do not know the name."

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed the Canadian, as if speaking to himself, "since this name recalls nothing to him, it is not he. Why did I indulge in such a foolish hope? And yet his features are just as Fabian's should be at his age. Pardon me," he continued, addressing himself to Tiburcio—"pardon me, young friend. I am a fool! I have lost my senses!

And throwing the fagot back upon the fire, he returned to his seat, placing himself with his back to the light, so that his countenance was concealed from the eyes of his companion.

Both were for some minutes silent. Tiburcio was endeavouring to penetrate the past, and recall some vague reminiscences of infancy that still lingered in his memory. The widow of Arellanos had told him all she knew of his early history—of the gigantic sailor who had nursed him; but it never occurred to Tiburcio that the great trapper by his side—*coureur-de-bois* of the American wilderness—could ever have been a seaman—much less that one of whom he had heard and read, and who was believed to have been his father. The strange interest which the trapper had exhibited, and the questions he had asked, were attributed by him to mere benevolence. He had no idea that the latter referred to any one whom he had formerly known, and who was now lost to him; for Bois-Rose had as yet told him nothing of his own history.

As Tiburcio continued to direct his thought upon the past, certain vague souvenirs began to shape themselves in his memory. They were only dim shadows, resembling the retro-

spect of a dream, and yet he was impressed with the belief that they had once been realities. He was the more confirmed in this idea, because such visions had occurred to him before—especially upon the night when he sat by the death-bed of his adopted mother—the widow of Arellanos. The revelations which she made to him before dying had revived in some mysterious way these shadowy souvenirs.

After a while the young man made known his thoughts to his companion by the camp-fire, whose interest appeared to be forcibly re-awakened, and who listened with eager attention to every word.

"I fancy I can remember," said Tiburcio—"that is, if it be not a dream I have sometimes dreamt—a terrible scene. I was in the arms of a woman who held me closely to her breast—that I was rudely snatched from her embrace by a wicked man—that she screamed and cried, but then all at once became silent; but after that I remember no more."

These words appeared to produce an effect

upon the Canadian ; and his interest visibly increased as he listened.

"You can remember no more ?" he inquired in an eager tone. "Can you not remember what sort of place it was in ? Was it in a house? or do you not remember whether the sea was around you? That is a thing one is not likely to forget."

"No," answered Tiburcio, "I saw the great ocean for the first time at Guaymas—that was four years ago—and yet, from what has been told me, I should have also seen it when I was a child."

"But when you saw it four years ago, did it not recall anything to your memory ?"

"No—nothing."

"Nothing ?" repeated the Canadian, interrogatively, and in a despairing tone.

"Nothing more than this same dream, which I have mistaken, no doubt, for reality."

Bois-Rose again resumed his attitude of melancholy, and remained silent.

After a pause Tiburcio continued :—

"One figure appears to me in these visions that is different from the rest."

"What sort of figure?" inquired the Canadian with renewed interest.

"That of a man of a hale rude countenance, but, notwithstanding, one of kindly expression. This man loved me, for I now have his face before me more clearly than I ever had; and I can trace that expression upon it."

"And did you love him?—can you remember that?" inquired the Canadian, while his heart beat with anxiety, as he awaited the answer.

"I am sure I did, he was so kind to me. I can remember he was kind to me."

"A tear stole over the bronzed cheek of the trapper as he listened to these words; and then turning his face once more so that it was hidden from the view of Tiburcio, he murmured to himself—

"Alas, poor Fabian! he too loved me—I know he did."

Then once more facing round to the fire, he hazarded a last question—

"Do you not remember one circumstance above all? Do you not remember that this man was suddenly separated from you in the midst of a terrible affray—?"

The emotion under which Bois-Rose was suffering hindered him from finishing his interrogatory. His head fell between his knees, and he awaited in trembling the response which Tiburcio might make.

The latter was silent for some seconds, as if endeavouring to arrange the confused thoughts that had suddenly sprung up in his mind.

"Hear me!" said he at length, "you who appear to be a beacon guiding my memories of the past—hear what I can remember at this moment. There was one day of terror and confusion. I saw much blood around me. The ground appeared to tremble—there was thunder, or the noise of cannon. I was in great fear within a dark chamber, where I had been shut up—a man came to me; it was the big man who loved me—"

Tiburcio paused for an instant, as if to grapple freshly with the vague reminiscences that were endeavouring to escape from him, while the Canadian appeared like one suffering the agony of suspense.

"Yes," resumed Tiburcio, "this man came to me—he lifted me up in his arms and carried me into the light—there he caused me to kneel down—oh! I now remember what he said—'*Kneel!*' said he, '*kneel, my child! and pray for your mother!*' That is all I can remember."

The Canadian, who was still seated, appeared to tremble convulsively as he listened to these last words; but when Tiburcio had finished speaking, he rose suddenly to his feet, and, rushing forward, threw his arms wildly around the young man, while at the same time he cried out in a broken voice:—

"*Your mother whom I found dead beside you.* Oh! my God! Once more in need of a father, hast thou sent him to me. Oh! Fabian! Fabian! Come to my heart! It was

I who caused you to kneel—I am that man who, in the bay of Elanchovi—"

At this moment the report of a carbine echoed in the woods; and a bullet, whistling through the air, passed close to the head of Tiburcio, striking a tree that stood behind him.

This unexpected intruder at once put an end to the dialogue; suddenly changing the tableaux of figures around the fire. Pepé, who had heard the shot, sprang instantaneously to his feet, and all three stood grasping their weapons, ready to receive the enemy who had committed the dastardly attempt.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOUVENIRS OF ELANCHOVI.

WHILE these incidents were passing by the trapper's camp-fire, Don Estevan was actively pursuing the execution of his plans.

From what little he had heard and seen of Diaz, he had conceived a high opinion of this person. He had observed in him a man of very different character from the crowd of adventurers who usually make up expeditions of the kind he was about to lead. Don Antonio had pronounced upon his courage; and the chief himself had noticed the reserve with which Diaz treated his new associates, Cuchillo and Baraja. Moreover, some words with

Diaz himself had confirmed Don Estevan's favourable impression, and convinced him that the Indian fighter was a man of brave and loyal heart. He regarded Diaz, therefore, as a valuable member of the expedition; and resolved to attach him as much as possible to his service—not merely with a view to his assistance in the search and conquest of the Valley of Gold, but for that higher aim which he had proposed to himself—the establishing of a kingdom.

While proceeding to the rendezvous designated by Cuchillo, Don Estevan took the opportunity of sounding Diaz on this important question. His bravery and address as a soldier were already known; but these two qualities were not sufficient for the purposes of the Spaniard. Something more would be required of the man of whom it was his design to make both his lieutenant and confidant.

The reply of Diaz to his very first question convinced Don Estevan that Diaz was the

very man he stood in need of; but the time had not yet arrived for the leader to open himself fully. He contented himself by simply observing that in the event of the expedition being crowned with success, it might lead to an important affair—the separation of Sonora from the Federal Republic.

At this moment the conversation between the chief and Pedro Diaz was interrupted by the report of a carbine. It was the shot fired by Cuchillo, which had caused the sudden alarm at the camp-fire of the trappers, but which, as already known, had failed in its aim.

If the outlaw had not yielded to his own cupidity, it is possible that Tiburcio would have fallen at that moment. The assassin would have taken with him his two associates, Baraja and Oroche; and as three bullets, instead of one, would thus have been aimed at the intended victim, the chances are that some of them would have reached his life. But Cuchillo did not desire to have a partner in the deed, who could claim a share in the

promised reward. He was determined to have the twenty onzas to himself; and this it was that induced him to leave Baraja and Oroche behind him. His design was well conceived, and might have been executed to his satisfaction. No doubt his aim had been true enough; but it chanced to be taken at an inopportune moment—just as Tiburcio sprang forward under the impulse of the revelation which Bois-Rose had made to him.

Having delivered his fire, the outlaw did not even stop to ascertain its effect; but, turning suddenly away, he ran to recover his horse. The dread of being pursued and overtaken by the two trappers caused him to fly at full speed. He dreaded the vengeance of two men, of whose singular courage and dexterity he had already been a witness. Fear, however, so confused his senses, that on facing round, he was unable to remember in what direction he had come, or where the horse had been left; and for some seconds he stood hesitating and doubtful.

Short as was this time, it might have proved fatal to him, but that his unexpected attack had somewhat disconcerted the camp. Both Bois-Rose and Tiburcio, interrupted while suffering the most vivid emotions, stood for some moments in a state of stupor, while Pepé was stretched out at full length, and supposed to be asleep.

This was only apparent, however, for at the report he sprang to his feet as if he had heard the "hish" of the bullet as it passed close to his ears.

"*Carramba!*" cried he, "I am curious to know which of us that bit of lead was intended for, you or myself, young man; for I have heard your conversation, and I am no stranger to this affair of Elanchovi."

"Elanchovi!" exclaimed the Canadian. "What! do you know anything of Elanchovi?"

"Ah, well do I," answered Pepé. "I have good reasons to know Elanchovi—but there's no time to talk of it now; I will settle that business by-and-bye, for it's a secret you can't

comprehend without my help. So indeed it is the young count, and you have found him again! Well, that's enough at present. Now, Bois-Rose, forward! You take to the right of where the shot came from, while this young man and I go to the left. The cowardly rascal who fired will no doubt be trying to turn our camp, and by going both ways, one or other of us will be likely to chance upon him. Away, Bois-Rose, away!"

Hurriedly pronouncing these words, Pepé grasped his rifle and struck off to the left, followed by Tiburcio, who had no other weapon than his knife. The Canadian, suddenly stooping, till his huge body was almost horizontal, glided off to the right under the branches of the trees, and then moved on with a silence and rapidity that showed how accustomed he was to this mode of progression.

The camp-fire was abandoned to the guard of the half-wild horse, that, freshly affrighted by the report of the carbine, once more

plunged and reared, until he had almost strangled himself in the noose of his lazo.

Meanwhile the day was beginning to break, and the red light of the fire was every moment growing paler under the first rays of the morning.

"Let us stop here," said Pepé to Tiburcio, as soon as they had reached a thicket where they could have the advantage of seeing without being seen, and from which they commanded a view of the road leading to the Salto de Agua. "Stand closely behind this sumac bush," continued he; "I have an idea that this *picaron*, who has such a crooked sight, will pass this way. If he do, I shall prove to him that the lessons Bois-Rose has given me have not been altogether lost upon me. I manage my piece somewhat better now than when I was in the service of her Catholic Majesty. There now—stand close, and not a word above a whisper."

Tiburcio—or, as we may now call him, Fabian de Mediana—obeyed with pleasure the

injunctions of his companion. His spirit, troubled with the few strange words he had heard from Bois-Rose and Pepé, was full of hope that the latter would be able to complete the revelation just begun; and he waited with anxious silence to hear what the ex-carabinier might say.

But the latter was silent. The sight of the young man—whom he had himself assisted in making an orphan, and despoiling not only of his title and wealth, but even of his name—renewed within him the remorse which twenty years had not sufficed to blot out from his memory. Under the dawning light he looked sadly but silently on the face of that child whom he had often seen playing upon the beach of Elanchovi. In the proud glance of the youth, Pepé saw once more the eyes of his high-born mother; and in the elegant and manly form, he recognized that of Don Juan de Mediana, his father; but twenty years of a rude and laborious life—twenty years of a struggle with the toils and dangers of the

desert—had imparted to Fabian a physical strength far superior to that of him who had given him being.

Pepé at length resolved to break the silence. He could no longer restrain himself, suffering as he was from such bitter memories.

"Keep your eye fixed upon the road," said he, "at yonder point, where it is lost among the trees. Watch that point whilst I talk to you. It is the way in which Bois-Rose and I do when there is any danger threatening us. At the same time, listen attentively to what I say."

"I listen," answered Fabian, directing his glance as his companion had instructed him.

"Do you remember nothing of your young days, more than you have just related to the Canadian?"

"Nothing; ever since I learnt that Arellanos was not my father, I have tried to remember something, but to no purpose. I do not even know who took care of me in my infancy."

"No more know they of you, my poor young man. I am the only one who can tell you these things of which you are ignorant."

"For heaven's sake, speak!" impatiently cried Fabian.

"Hush! not so loud!" cautioned the trapper. "These woods, remote and solitary as they seem, nevertheless contain your deadliest enemy—unless, indeed, it was at me that the bullet was aimed. That may make a difference in your favour. In fact, since I have not been able to recognize you, I do not see how *he* can."

"Who—of whom do you speak?" brusquely demanded Fabian.

"Of your mother's murderer—of the man who has robbed you of your titles, your honours, your wealth, and your name."

"I should be noble and rich then?" cried Fabian, interrogatively. "Oh, that I had but known it sooner—only yesterday!"

Fabian's thoughts were upon Rosarita. If

he could have told this to her, in that sad parting interview, perhaps the result might have been different.

"Noble! yes!" replied Pepé, "you should be and shall yet, if I mistake not; but rich—alas! you are no more rich."

"What matters it?" responded Fabian, "to-day it would be too late."

"Yes, but it does matter—ah! I know two men—one at least—who shall restore to you what you have lost, or die in the attempt."

"Of whom do you speak?"

"Of one who, without knowing it, aided to some extent in the assassination of your mother—of one of whom that sad souvenir has a thousand times troubled the conscience—who, in the silence of the night, in the midst of the woods, has often fancied he could hear that cry of anguish, which at the time he mistook for the wailing of the breeze against the cliffs of Elanchovi. It was the death-scream of your poor mother. Ah! Don Fabian de Mediana," continued the speaker, in reply to

the gesture of horror made by the young man, "Ah! that man's conscience has reproached him in stronger terms than you could use; and at this hour he is ready to spill the last drop of his blood for you."

The impetuous passions of Fabian, for a moment softened by thoughts of Rosarita, were again inflamed to their utmost. He had already sworn to avenge the death of Arellanos, and here was a new object of vengeance, the murderer of his own mother! The bland image of Rosarita at once disappeared, paling away as the fire-light eclipsed by the brighter gleams of the rising sun.

"My mother's assassin!" cried he, his eye flashing with furious indignation. "And you know him?"

"You also—you have eaten with him at the same table—under the same roof—that which you have just now quitted!"

Pepé, without further interrogation, went on to recount what he knew of the events of Elanchovi. He told Fabian who he was—

that Don Estevan was no other than his uncle, Antonio de Mediana—of the marriage of his mother with Don Juan his father—of the consequent chagrin of the younger brother—of his infamous design, and the manner it had been carried into execution. How Don Antonio, returning from the wars in Mexico, with his band of piratical adventurers, had landed in a boat upon the beach at Ensenada—how he had entered the château, and, with the help of his two subordinate villains, had abstracted the countess and her infant—himself Fabian—how the assassination of the mother had been committed in the boat, and the child only spared in the belief that the murderer's steel was not necessary—in the belief that the waves and the cold atmosphere of a November night would complete the deed of death.

Nor did Pepé conceal his own conduct connected with this affair. He disclosed all to his half frantic listener—the after-actions of Don Antonio with regard to himself—his imprisonment and subsequent banishment to the fish-

eries of Ceuta—his escape at a later period to the prairies of America, and his meeting with Bois-Rose—with whom, however, no recognition had ever been established about the events of Elanchovi—since neither had ever mentioned that name in hearing of the other.

All these things Pepé narrated in turn, but briefly as the circumstances required. The rest of his history Fabian already knew—at least, the greater part of it. Bois-Rose had partially made the revelation.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAN IN THE YELLOW JACKET.

Bois-rose, as already stated, had gone in a direction opposite to that taken by his comrades. His mind full of the danger with which Fabian was surrounded—Fabian restored to him as if by a miracle—the Canadian continued to advance with rapid strides. He examined every opening and aisle of the forest with an eye keenly bent, and an ear straining to catch the slightest sound.

After making a distance of a hundred yards or so, he stopped in his tracks; and laying himself flat along the grass, placed his ear to the ground and listened attentively. In a few

seconds' time a dull sound reached him—the hoof-strokes of a horse that seemed to approach the spot where he lay.

"Pepé is right," muttered he to himself, as he started to his feet; "the skunk is coming this way. Good! he has the advantage of me in being mounted; but I have a rifle that I dare say will make up for the difference—*enfant de grace!* he is here!"

As this exclamation escaped him, the trapper was seen suddenly to raise his long rifle to his shoulder. At the same instant a leathern jacket of yellowish colour appeared at some distance off among the leaves, and at about the height of a man on horseback.

The sharp crack of the rifle was instantly followed by the disappearance of the leathern jacket; and, since for marksmen like Bois-Rose to take aim is to hit, the latter had no doubt that his enemy had fallen to the ground, either dead or wounded. For a moment he thought of reloading; but the ardour of his vengeance urged him to rush forward and

make sure of his victim. In the event that the assassin should have companions, the trapper trusted to his great strength to equalize the chances of a hand-to-hand conflict. Neglecting all further precautions, therefore, like the hunter rushing upon the wounded stag, he dashed forward through the trees towards the spot where his enemy had fallen.

As he drew near, he could perceive a horse rearing furiously in front of him, crushing the underwood as he plunged violently from side to side. The horse was saddled and bridled, but there was no one in the saddle. This led Bois-Rose to the belief that his bullet had dismounted the rider.

All at once a shrill whistle rang through the trees; and the horse uttering a loud neigh—as if in reply—galloped off in the direction from which the signal had come. After making several lengths through the bushes, the horse came to a stop. Bois-Rose ran after, and in a few bounds was beside the animal. It was still dark under the shadow of the trees, but

the Canadian could make out the form of a man upon the ground, at that moment struggling in the act of raising himself. Just then the horse dropped upon his knees; the man, grasping the pommel of the saddle, succeeded in crawling into it; a signal started the animal to its feet again; and before the trapper could come up to the spot, both horse and man were fast disappearing behind the foliage of the trees.

Bois-Rose launched after them a furious malediction; and, reloading his rifle as rapidly as he could, sent a bullet in the same direction; but the continued strokes of the horse's feet falling upon his ear told him that his random shot had been delivered to no purpose.

Without following farther, he turned in the opposite direction, and after imitating, three times in succession, the howling of the prairie wolf—a signal for Pepé—he strode off to the spot where the yellow jacket had fallen from the saddle.

There he perceived the grass pressed down

as if where a man's body had fallen upon it; and at about the height of a man on horseback, the branches of the sumac tree were broken, as though the horseman had caught at them in falling. There were no traces of blood, however—not a drop could be seen; but a carbine lying upon the ground showed that the horseman, in his hurry to escape, had left his weapon behind him.

"My poor Fabian!" muttered he, "this will serve for him. In these woods a knife is not much worth; this will be a better weapon for him."

Somewhat consoled by this reflection, the trapper now turned to go back in the direction of the camp-fire. He had not made a dozen steps, when the sharp report of a rifle fell upon his ear.

"It is Pepé's!" he cried. "I know it. God grant he may have made a better shot than I have done!"

Just then a second report echoed through the woods. It sounded sadly on the ear of the

Canadian—who did not recognize it—and being now the victim of a terrible uncertainty, he ran with all speed in the direction whence the sound had come.

Another report that now reached him added to the anguish of his suspense; for this time, like the last, it was not the well-known crack of his comrade's rifle.

Almost at the same instant, however, he heard Pepé's voice calling out:—

"Come back, Fabian! come back! What is the use of——"

A third detonation seemed to cut short the speech of the ex-coastguard—as if he had fallen by the bullet—while no voice of Fabian was heard to make reply. A profound and frightful silence followed the last shot, which was broken only by the voice of the mock-bird, who appeared imperfectly to imitate the words that had been spoken, and then commenced chanting a plaintive song—as if mourning the death of those who had fallen by the shots.

The Canadian ran on for some moments, until—unable longer to restrain himself—he paused, and cried out, at the risk of exposing himself to some ambushed enemy—

"Hola! Pepé!—where are you?"

"Here!" answered the voice of the ex-carabinier. "We are here, straight before you—Don Fabian and myself. Come on!"

A cry of joy was all the response the Canadian could give; and the next moment another joyous shout, as he came upon the ground and perceived that both his companions were still in safety.

"The skunk ought to be wounded," said he; "my shot caused him to tumble out of his saddle. You were perhaps more fortunate than I? I heard your piece speak—have you throwed him, Pepé?"

Pepé shook his head in the negative.

"If you mean the fellow in the yellow jacket," said he, "I fancy the devil has *him* under his protection; for I had a fair sight on him—and yet he's off! He's not alone, how-

ever; there are four other horsemen along with him; and in one of these gentlemen I have recognized him whom they here call Don Estevan de Arechiza, but who is no other than——"

"I have seen only the fellow in the leather jacket," interrupted the Canadian; "and here is his gun, Fabian, for you. But are you quite safe?" continued he, in an anxious tone. "You are sure you are not wounded?"

"No, no—my friend—my father!" cried Fabian, flinging himself into the trapper's arms, as if they had just met after a long separation.

"Oh, Pepé!" cried the Canadian, his eyes filling with tears, as he pressed Fabian convulsively against his great bosom, and then held him at a distance as if to get a better view of him. "Is he not grand? Is he not beautiful? He—once my little Fabian—oh!"

"Pepé has told me all," said Fabian.

"Among these men is the murderer of my mother."

"Yes," exclaimed Pepé; "and, by the Virgin of Atocha, let us not delay here. There is no time for sentiment—the villain must not escape us. Justice, so long evaded, must now have its due."

"As God wills!" rejoined Fabian.

The three friends now held a rapid council as to what course was best to be taken. It was concluded by their resolving to follow the horsemen as rapidly as possible along the road which these had taken—the road to Tubac.

CHAPTER X.

THE BLOOD OF THE MEDIANAS.

After having uselessly discharged their carbines several times, from too great a distance for the balls to be dangerous, Oroche and Baraja had rejoined Cuchillo.

The outlaw was as pale as death; the ball fired at him by the Canadian had creased his head, and it was this had caused him to fall from his horse. Doubtless Bois-Rose would then have crushed him, like a venomous reptile, but for the horse. The noble animal, seeing that his master could not raise himself unaided, bent down that he might seize his mane, and so reach the saddle, and when he

felt his master once more firmly seated on his back, he had set off at full gallop, and carried him away beyond the reach of Bois-Rose.

This was not the only danger run by the outlaw. When his accomplices had rejoined him, and all three had come up with Don Estevan and Diaz, another danger was in store for him. The Spaniard had no need to interrogate Cuchillo in order to learn that Fabian had once more escaped. From the disappointed air of the two followers, and the paleness of the outlaw, who was still tottering in his saddle, Don Estevan guessed all.

Deceived in his expectation, the rage of the Spaniard burst out. He rode up to Cuchillo, crying, in a voice of thunder—"Cowardly and clumsy knave!" and in his blind fury, without reflecting that Cuchillo alone knew the secret of the Golden Valley, he drew his pistol. Luckily for the outlaw, Pedro Diaz threw himself quickly between him and Don Estevan, whose fury gradually subsided.

"And those men who are with him—who are they?" cried he.

"The two tiger-killers," replied Baraja.

A short deliberation took place in a low voice between Don Estevan and Pedro Diaz, which ended by these words, pronounced aloud:—

"We must destroy the bridge of the Salto de Agua, and the devil is in it if they overtake us before we reach Tubac;" and at this they all set off at full gallop.

Fabian had heard Don Estevan say to Cuchillo, the night before, that he should only pass two hours at the hacienda before his departure; and as the last events which had taken place at Don Augustin's must have tended to shorten his stay, there was no time to hesitate. The horse of Pepé became a precious auxiliary in following the fugitives, and, if necessary, for cutting off their retreat. It remained to be decided who should mount him, and undertake an enterprise so perilous as opposing singly the flight of five armed horsemen.

"I shall follow them," said Fabian.

So saying, he rushed towards the animal, who recoiled in terror; but seizing the cord by which he was tethered, the young man threw a handkerchief over his eyes. Trembling in every limb, the horse remained quiet, while Fabian brought Pepé's saddle, which he placed on his back, and then arranged the lazo so as to form at once a bridle and a snaffle. He was about to mount without removing the handkerchief, when Pepé, at a sign from Bois-Rose, interposed.

"Gently," said he; "if anyone here has a right to mount this animal, it is I—I who captured him, and to whom he belongs."

"Do you not see," cried Fabian, impatiently, "that he is not *branded*, which shows that he has never yet been mounted; if you care for the safety of your limbs, I advise you not to try him."

"That is my business," said Pepé, advancing; but scarcely had the animal felt his hand on the pommel, and his foot on the stirrup, than with a furious bound he threw

him ten feet off. Pepé uttered an angry oath, but Fabian vaulted into the saddle without touching the stirrups.

"Stop! Fabian, stop!" cried Bois-Rose in a tone of anguish, "you must not go alone and risk falling into their hands."

But already Fabian had removed the handkerchief; and the noble animal, his eyes restored to the light, made furious efforts to free himself from a weight which he felt for the first time, but at last stood motionless and trembling. Bois-Rose profited by this moment to seize the bridle, but was shaken off by another furious bound, and the terrified animal rushed away with such impetuosity that it was no longer in human power to restrain him. For a few moments the Canadian watched the intrepid rider struggling with the fury of the horse, and then both disappeared from his sight.

"They will kill him," cried he; "they are five to one. Let us follow as closely as we can, Pepé, to protect once more my lately recovered child."

Bois-Rose threw his rifle over his shoulder, and was already taking gigantic strides after Fabian.

"The horse is difficult to manage," cried he. "I am certain that he will not go straight; we shall perhaps arrive as soon as he. Ah! Don Estevan, your evil star has guided you to these outlaws."

Fabian, like those legendary cavaliers whom nothing appals, passed with fearful rapidity over hillocks, ravines, and fallen trunks of trees. Pepé was not wrong; in spite of the start that the pursued had of him, Fabian would soon have overtaken them, could he have guided his horse; but luckily, or unluckily, for him, the intractable animal deviated constantly from the track; and it was only after prodigious efforts that he could bring him back to the road, which wound through the wood, and on which the traces of the five fugitives were visible, and thus the pursuer constantly lost ground.

However, after an hour of this struggle, the

horse began to find he had met with his master, and that his strength was becoming exhausted; the curb, held by a vigorous hand, compressed his jaws, his speed gradually relaxed, his bounds became less violent, and he ended by obeying the hand which guided him. As if by common consent, man and horse stopped to take breath. Fabian profited by this rest to look around him; his heart began to beat less rapidly, and he could both hear and see. Trampled leaves, newly-broken branches, and the prints of horses' feet were clear indications of the passage of those who fled before him.

Suddenly the sound of falling water struck upon his ear. In another moment the fugitives would have gained the rustic bridge which crossed the wide and deep bed of the torrent: their united efforts might destroy it, and then all pursuit would be useless. While he was seeking for a ford, Don Estevan would escape through the vast plains which extended to Tubac. This thought aroused anew the

young man's passion; and, pressing his horse's side, he galloped along the path, the windings of which still hid his enemies from view. This time his horse had grown docile, and flew along the road.

The noise of the torrent soon drowned that of the horse's feet, but before long human voices mingled with it. This sound produced upon Fabian as powerful an effect as his repeated blows did upon his horse; a few minutes more and he would confront the enemies whom he was burning to reach. The impetuous pace of a horse excites a man to the greatest degree; horse and rider re-act upon each other, and Fabian in his excitement forgot the inequality of numbers; therefore the spectacle which met his eyes was one that caused him a bitter disappointment.

As already stated, a bridge, composed of trunks of trees roughly cut, joined the two steep banks, between which roared the Salto de Agua. This bridge, broad enough for a horse to pass over, rested at each end on the

bare rock, without anything to secure it, and the strength of a few men might overturn the trees and render the crossing impossible.

Just as Fabian reached the bridge, four horses, urged on by their riders, were pulling vigorously, with ropes attached to the trees, which, at that moment yielding, fell with a crash into the torrent.

Fabian uttered a cry of rage. A man turned round—it was Don Estevan, but Don Estevan separated from him by an impassable barrier, and looking triumphantly at him.

Fabian, his clothes torn to pieces by the brambles, and his face so transformed by fury as to be scarcely recognizable, rushed forward in his blind rage to cross the river. But his horse reared violently, and refused to proceed.

"Fire on him!" cried Don Estevan, "or the madman will derange all our plans. Fire, I tell you!"

Three carbines were already pointed at Fabian, when at some distance behind him

loud voices were heard, and Pepé and the Canadian appeared. At the sight of these formidable rifles, the outlaws hesitated; Fabian made a new effort, but the frightened horse plunged and reared as before.

"Fire!" again cried Don Estevan.

"Woe to him who does!" shouted the Canadian; "and you, Fabian, in heaven's name, retire!"

"Yes, it is I, Fabian!" cried the Count, in a voice which drowned the thunder of the torrent, and the cries of the hunters, "Fabian, who comes to avenge his mother's blood upon the infamous Don Antonio de Mediana!"

Then, while his voice still sounded in the ears of Don Estevan, who, for the first time in his life, stood motionless with terror, the impetuous young man drew his knife and pricked his horse with it.

This time the animal gave a furious leap across the gulf and reached the opposite bank; but one of his feet slipped, and after a short struggle he fell backwards, both horse and

rider disappearing in the flood. A cry of anguish burst from the Canadian, and one of triumph from the opposite bank; but both were quickly drowned by the roar of the torrent as it closed over its double prey.

CHAPTER XI.

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE DESERT.

ABOUT a fortnight after the events just related, other scenes were taking place in a part of the desert which extends from Tubac to the American frontier. But before referring to the actors, let us describe the theatre on which they once more met.

The vast plains which separate Mexico from the United States are known only by the vague reports of hunters or gold seekers—at least that part watered by the river Gila and its tributaries. This river, which takes its rise in the distant mountains of the Mimbres, passes, under various names, through an im-

mense extent of sandy, barren country, the arid monotony of which is interrupted only by the ravines hollowed by the waters, which, in their erratic course, ravage without fertilizing.

The reader must imagine himself at a spot distant about sixty leagues from Tubac. The sun, inclining towards the west, was already darting oblique rays; it was the hour when the wind, although still hot, no longer seems to come out of the mouth of a furnace. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and light white clouds, tinted with rose colour, indicated that the sun had run two-thirds of his course; above, in the deep blue sky, an eagle hung motionless over the desert, the only visible inhabitant of the air. From the height where the king of birds balanced himself majestically, his eye could perceive on the immense plain many human beings, some of whom were in groups, and others at so great a distance apart as to be visible to him alone, and not to each other.

Just beneath the soaring bird was a kind of

irregular natural circle formed by a hedge of cacti, with their fleshy leaves and thorny points, with which were mingled the pale foliage of the *bois-de-fer*. At one end of this hedge was an elevated piece of ground, two or three feet high, with a flat top, which overlooked it on all sides. All around this entrenchment, untouched by the hand of man, stretched arid plains, or a succession of little hillocks, which appeared like motionless waves in a sea of sand.

A troop of about sixty men on horseback had alighted in this place. The steaming horses showed that they had travelled fast. There was a confused noise of human voices, the neighing of horses, and the rattling of every kind of weapon—for it did not appear to be a regular cavalry corps. Lances with red pennons, muskets, carbines, and double-barrelled guns, were hanging from the saddle bows.

Some of the men were cleaning their horses, while others were lying on the sand under the

shelter of the cacti; a little farther back were a number of mules advancing towards the halting-place, and behind them again some twenty carts, heavily laden.

Visible to the eyes of the eagle, on the road along which these travellers must have passed, were corpses of men and animals strewn on the arid plain, marking the bloody track of this band of adventurers. Doubtless our readers have already recognized the Gold-seekers under the command of Don Estevan de Arechiza.

When the mules and carts joined the horsemen, the mules were unharnessed and the horses unsaddled; the carts were unloaded, and then linked together with iron chains; while the saddles of the animals were piled upon one another; and served with the cacti, to fill up the spaces between the wheels and form a formidable barricade. The animals were tied to the carts, and the cooking utensils placed by the side of the brushwood brought from a distance; a portable forge was estab-

lished; and this colony, which seemed as though it had risen from the ground as by a miracle, was soon busily employed, while the anvil resounded with the blows which were fashioning horses' shoes and repairing wheels.

A man richly dressed, but whose clothes were faded with sun and dust, alone remained on horseback in the middle of the camp, looking earnestly around him. This man was the chief of the troop. Three other men were occupied meanwhile in fixing the poles of a tent, and then placing on its summit a red banner, on which was painted a scutcheon with six golden stars on an azure ground, with the motto, "I will watch." The chief then alighted, and after having given an order to one of his men, who mounted and left the camp, entered the tent. All these preparations had occupied barely half-an-hour, so much were they simplified by habit.

To the right of the camp, but far distant, arose from the sand a mass of gum-trees and *ironwoods*, the only trees produced by these

arid plains. Here a second troop had halted. They had neither carts nor baggage mules, but were about double the number of the other party. By the bronzed complexions of the riders, some almost naked, others covered with skins and with waving plumes of eagle's feathers, and by the brilliant red and yellow with which they were painted, it was easy to recognize a party of Indians.

Ten of them—doubtless the chiefs—gravely seated round a fire which produced more smoke than flame, were passing from hand to hand the calumet or pipe of council. Their arms, consisting of leathern bucklers—surrounded by a thick fringe of feathers—axes, and knives, were laid by their side. At some little distance, and out of hearing, five warriors held a number of horses, strangely accoutred with wooden saddles covered with skins. These horses belonged to the chiefs, and seemed difficult to restrain.

As one of the chiefs passed the calumet to the others, he pointed to a spot in the horizon.

The eyes of a European would only have seen a slight grey cloud against the blue sky; but the Indian recognized a column of smoke—that rising from the camp of the whites.

At that moment, an Indian messenger arrived with some news, and all the party crowded round him.

Now, between the two camps, the eye of the eagle could discover another rider, but alone, and out of sight of both parties. It was, doubtless, he who was being sought for by the messenger despatched from the camp of the gold-seekers. This man rode a grey horse, and seemed to be seeking a track; he was dressed as a European; and his complexion, though much bronzed, denoted that he belonged to that race.

It was Cuchillo, who, resuming his course, caused his horse to mount one of the hillocks; where he could perceive the columns of smoke arising from the two camps. The Indians perceived him at the same time; for a long howl, like that of a hundred panthers, arose,

and the king of birds, terrified by the tumult, soon became only a black speck in the clouds. The outlaw fled rapidly in the opposite direction, and the Indians rushed after him.

Still further in the horizon, placed so as to form a triangle with the other camps, was a third group of men, scarcely visible to the eagle himself. They were encamped upon a small islet, in the midst of a river fringed with trees, and over which rested a light fog. The desert of Tubac ended at this river, which, flowing from east to west, divided, a league below the island, into two branches, and formed a vast delta—bounded by a chain of hills, which were now shrouded by the fog.

In this delta, more than a league square, lay the Golden Valley.

All these different groups of people will soon meet, like the waves which, raised by opposing winds, break against each other in the immensity of the ocean.

Thanks to a skilful manœuvre of Pedro Diaz, the expedition, on arriving near the Golden

Valley, had concealed for two days from the Indians the route they had taken. But to associate himself with sixty companions did not please Cuchillo, who, under the pretence of reconnoitering the country, had separated himself from his companions. It was to indicate the position of their bivouac that they had lighted a fire in the camp, and to find him that Don Estevan had sent out a messenger. Cuchillo, indeed, was the only one who could guide them to the Golden Valley.

A bold thought was in Cuchillo's mind, but the execution of this project was yet to lead him to a fearful punishment, which he well deserved. We cannot, however, speak of this at present.

A man, as we have said, had arrived at the Indian camp with news. This man, in seeking the enemies whom they were pursuing, had reached the bank of the river, and, concealed by the willows, had perceived three white men. These three men could only be Bois-Rose, Pepé the Spaniard, and Fabian de

Mediana. It was, indeed, this trio of friends.

We left Bois-Rose and Pepé on the banks of the torrent in which the young Spaniard, excited by the tale he had heard of his mother's assassination, and full of fury, had nearly found a tomb. Fortunately, the fall had been fatal only to the horse, and the rider had escaped by a miracle. The three friends had resumed their pursuit; but, forced to proceed on foot, while their enemies were on horseback, they had only arrived at Tubac on the day the expedition left it, after having travelled sixty leagues in five days.

Then it became more easy to follow the adventurers—who were retarded by their baggage—and ten days' march had brought the intrepid companions to the same point as their enemies; for, although forced for safety to take a different route, they had rarely lost sight of the fires of their bivouacs. Surrounded as he was, however, Don Estevan could not be easily captured.

When the Indian messenger had finished his report, the warriors deliberated afresh. The youngest of the ten, called upon to speak first, said:—

"The whites have sometimes the legs of the deer, sometimes the courage of the puma, and the cunning of the jackal. They have concealed their route for two days from eyes which can trace that of the eagle in the air; it is another *ruse* on their part to scatter their warriors, and we must seek them near the island in the river Gila."

After a minute's silence, another spoke:—

"The whites have, doubtless, a thousand stratagems at their service, but can they increase their stature? No; and if, on the contrary, they could make themselves so small that the Indian eye could not perceive them, they would do it. Our enemies are from the south—these men just discovered come from the north—it is not, therefore, towards the island that we must go."

In the midst of these contradictory opinions,

the shouts of the Indians, at the sight of Cuchillo, burst forth, compelling the chiefs to suspend their deliberations until the warriors who pursued him had returned. When they reappeared, they reported that they had discovered the trail of the whites. Then the second chief who had spoken—a man of tall stature, and darker in colour than most of his tribe—whence his name of the *Blackbird*—again spake:—

"I have said that the men who come from the north could not form part of those who come from the south. I have always seen that the south and the north are enemies of one another, like the winds which blow from opposite quarters. Let us send a message to the three warriors on the island, and ask them to join us against the other whites, and the Indian will be gladdened at the death of his enemies by the hands of each other."

But this advice, dictated by prudence and knowledge of mankind, found no support in the council. The Blackbird was forced to

yield, and it was agreed that the mass of the troop should march against the camp, while only a small detachment should be sent to the island.

A quarter of an hour after, one hundred men set off for the camp; while twenty others went towards the island, thirsting for the blood of the three men who had taken shelter there.

It is towards the end of the month of March that we find the gold-seekers and their chief in the camp described, after they had lost by the Indians, and by the numberless dangers of the desert, forty of their men. But although weakened by this loss, still the chances between them and the Indians, ever ready to defend their territory, were nearly equal. On each side was cunning, and the habit of following an almost invisible track, while the cupidity of the one was equalled by the ferocity of the other.

Nevertheless, the enthusiasm was no longer so great as on the day when, after having celebrated a mass for the success of their ex-

pedition, the adventurers had set off from Tubac, uttering cries of triumph, which were accompanied by the sound of cannon and the acclamations of the inhabitants. No precaution had been omitted by Don Estevan, who seemed to foresee everything. Until then, in this kind of expedition, each man had acted for himself, and trusted to himself and his own horse for his safety; but the Spaniard had disciplined this band, and forced them to obey him, while the carts that he had brought served both for transport and for defence. Thus moved the ancient people of the north, in their invading journeys towards the south of Europe. No former expedition had penetrated so far into the desert as had this one, under the guidance of its skilful chief.

The responsibility which weighed upon Don Estevan would, of itself, have been enough to account for the clouds upon his brow; but, perhaps, he thought more of the past than of the present or the future. He had been able to compare the energy of Fabian with the

pusillanimity of the Senator Tragaduros. Carried away by the course of events, he had thought only of removing his nephew from his path; but when the young man disappeared in the gulf, shouting a fierce menace to his father's brother, he had suddenly felt an immense void, and a scarcely-closed wound had re-opened in his heart. He missed one thing amidst all his prosperity; and in spite of himself, the pride of race revived in his breast, and an ardent sympathy had seized upon him for the ardent young man loved by Doña Rosarita, who might, perhaps, have replaced the Senator in the execution of his bold plan.

He regretted having allowed himself to be led away by circumstances; and at the moment when the last of the Medianas—except himself—disappeared from his eyes, he regretted an heir so worthy to bear the name. Now, when on the eve of mounting another step by the conquest of the Golden Valley, this regret became more vivid.

This was not the only care, however, which then pre-occupied Antonio de Mediana; the absence of Cuchillo made him uneasy, and he began to have a suspicion of this man's perfidy.

Cuchillo had gained considerably upon the Indians who pursued him; but no sooner did he perceive through the hedge the entrenchment raised by his companions than he slackened his pace. The distance at which he still was from the camp was too great to enable him to be perceived by the sentinels; and when he saw the Indians who pursued him halt at sight of the column of smoke, he stopped altogether. His plan was to go into the camp as late as possible, so as only to give the alarm at the last moment. He knew enough of the Indians, to play this dangerous game with the most perfect *sang-froid;* he knew that they never attacked but with superior numbers; also, that some hours would elapse, before they decided on attacking the camp at all; that, satisfied with having reco-

vered the track of their enemies, his pursuers would return and carry the report to their companions.

He was right; and enchanted at the effect of his *ruse*, the outlaw lay down behind a mound of earth, ready to resume his course when his senses should warn him of the approach of danger. By regaining the camp only a few minutes before the attack, he hoped also to escape the questions of Don Estevan.

"We should have sixty to divide the treasure," thought he, "had I not taken care to diminish the number. Then, while the whites and reds are fighting together, I——"

A distant explosion, like that of a rifle, interrupted his meditations. This sound appeared to come from the north, and, indeed, proceeded from the river, where were Bois-Rose and his companions.

"It is strange that such a sound should proceed from that quarter," said Cuchillo,

"for the white camp is eastward, and the red westward.

A second shot was heard; then a third, followed by a short silence, to which succeeded a continued firing. Cuchillo trembled. He fancied that a second white party, distinct from his, were about to seize the coveted treasures. Then he feared that Don Estevan had despatched a detachment to take possession of the Golden Valley. But reason soon showed him the little probability of either of these surmises. A party of men must have left traces which he should have discovered during the two days he had been scouring the country; and then it was not probable that Don Estevan would have dared to weaken his force by dividing it. He, therefore, lay still, and concluded that the sounds proceeded from some party of Amecan hunters surprised by the natives.

We must return to the camp of Don Antonio, where the firing had also been heard, and where it had given rise to a host of conjectures.

Evening had come on, and red clouds marked the fiery trace of the setting sun; the earth begun to freshen up at the approach of night, and the crescent of the moon to grow more and more brilliant, under the light of which the camp appeared picturesque.

On the rising ground which overlooked the whole entrenchment arose, as we have said, the chief's tent with its floating banner. A feeble light from within indicated that he was still watching, and several fires, made in holes dug in the sand or surrounded by stones—lest their light should betray their position—threw a subdued red glare around; while, in case of attack, fagots were prepared to illumine the camp. Groups of men lying down, and others preparing the evening meal, were mingled with the horses and mules, who were eating their rations of maize.

The careless and satisfied look upon every face showed that these men confided the

care of their defence wholly to their chief. At the entrance to the tent lay a man, like a dog watching over his master; and from his long hair, and the guitar by the side of his rifle, it was easy to recognize Oroche. His time seemed to be divided between the contemplation of a heaven glittering with stars, and the care of keeping up a fire of green wood, the smoke of which rose in a vertical column silvered by the moon. Beyond the entrenchments the moonlight whitened the plain, and even the fog which covered the summits of a chain of mountains which were visible on the horizon.

Behind the carts paced the sentinels, carbine in hand. Among the various groups of men scattered about were Benito, the servant of Don Estevan, and Baraja. They were engaged in conversation.

"Señor Benito," said Baraja, speaking to the old herdsman, "you who are so well acquainted with all the affairs of these deserts, can you explain to me what is the cause of

these shots which we have been hearing ever since noon, and which can only be fired by our enemies, the Indians?"

"It is difficult to say," answered Benito; "but certainly they must have some good reason for wasting so much powder—a scarce article among them. It appears probable enough that poor Cuchillo is captured; or may be the Señor Gayferos, who was sent after him."

"But why should they keep firing from time to time?—one shot would be enough to put an end to either Cuchillo or Gayferos; whereas, we have heard volleys."

"Ah! it may be that the savages are practising one of their horrible modes of punishment—perhaps they are firing at their victims merely for the sport. There is one terrible torture they inflict—I remember to have been——."

"Hold there, friend Benito!" cried Baraja, interrupting him, "no more of your horrible stories; I have not forgotten that frightful night by the well of La Poza.

"Well," rejoined the herdsman, "unless they are firing at either Cuchillo or Gayferos—or perhaps at both—I cannot divine the cause of their continued fusillade. These Indians are as curious as the very devil; and they can extract a secret almost as effectually as the Holy Inquisition itself. Perhaps they are frightening either the guide or Gayferos to betray the situation of our camp."

"God forbid they should succeed!" exclaimed Baraja.

"I join you in the prayer," said the ex-herdsman; "but I cannot help remarking how imprudent in our chief to permit the fire. The smoke has been rising all day like a column. In an atmosphere like this, it may be seen for leagues off."

"I agree with you," replied Baraja; "but then you know it was kindled at the express wish of the guide—so that he might find the way to where we should be encamped. Both humanity towards Cuchillo, as well as our own interest in his safety, required us to light the fire."

"Ah! that is not so certain. Between ourselves, I haven't much confidence in this Cuchillo. He appears to be one of those guides whose paths always end in quagmires."

"But have you not heard the rumour of the camp?"

"What rumour? That Don Estevan is not going by mere hazard to search for a mine of gold; but that he already knows of the existence of a rich placer? Is it that you mean?"

"Yes—or rather that Don Estevan knows of the existence of the placer; but not *where* it is, or the road that leads to it. This is only known to Cuchillo, whose death would therefore be an irreparable loss to all of us."

"Bah!" replied the ex-herdsman, with a shake of the head; "Cuchillo's face is one that could never deceive an experienced eye. For my part, I hope I am deceived in him, though I doubt it."

"Oh, Señor Benito, you always look upon the dark side of things."

"Well, perhaps so—and on this very night I may especially appear a bird of ill omen, for I cannot help feeling the presentiment that there is danger near us. See! look yonder! The animals have left off eating—both mules and horses. Observe how they stand listening, as if they heard something. Well, what is to come will come; and I have not much to lose—even my life is not worth much."

And with this consolatory speech the old shepherd wrapped himself up in his cloak, and lay down to sleep.

Not so Baraja. The words of his comrade had produced their effect, and he was unable to compose himself to rest. His imagination depicted to him a thousand phantoms, and every moment he fancied he could hear the yells of the savages, as they rushed forward to attack the camp. Not that the ex-haciendado was altogether a coward; but there was reason for his fears; and the darkness of the night, as well as the strange

behaviour of the animals, was sufficient cause to render even a brave man apprehensive of danger.

After the long day's march, all the adventurers were asleep—stretched here and there upon the ground. The sentinels alone were awake, and watching—now and then raising along the lines their monotonous cry of "*Sentinela alerte!*" It was the only sound that for a long time interrupted the silence of the night.

After remaining awake for a considerable time, Baraja began to feel confidence, and perhaps would have gone to sleep, like the others, when all at once he heard several shots, similar to those that had been heard during the day, and which appeared to proceed from the same direction.

"They are still firing over there," said he, nudging the old herdsman so as to awake him.

"No matter," grumbled Benito; "let them fire away. If it be not at Cuchillo or Gay-

feros, we needn't care. So, friend Baraja, I wish you good night—go to sleep yourself. In the desert, time for sleep is precious, although at any minute you may be sent to sleep in eternity—Good night!"

After this terrifying speech, the ex-herdsman drew his cloak over his eyes to keep out the rays of the moon, when a noise made by the mules caused him to raise his head again. "Ah!" said he, "the red devils are not far off."

The neigh of a horse was now heard from a distance, accompanied by a cry of alarm, and the next moment a man was seen riding up at full gallop.

"It is Cuchillo," cried the servant. Then, in a low voice, to Baraja, "Let travellers take care when the will-o'-the wisp dances on the plain!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE ALARM.

THAT evening, as usual, Don Estevan watched in his tent, while his people reposed. By the light of a smoky candle, the Spaniard, in spite of the modest appearance of his lodging, and of his dust-covered clothes, seemed to have lost nothing of the dignity of his appearance or of his grand air. His complexion, more sun-burnt than usual, gave his countenance a still more energetic character. He appeared pensive, but his thoughts were no longer so uneasy as they had been. On the eve, after so many dangers, of realizing his vast designs, Don Estevan had, for the time at least, shaken

off gloomy thoughts, and fixed his mind on the hope of a success which he believed infallible.

He had raised the canvas which served as a door, in order to glance upon the men who reposed around, and seemed to wish to compare his means of action with the aim he was pursuing.

"Nearly twenty years ago," thought he, "I commanded a party of sailors, nearly equal in number, and as determined as these. I was then only an obscure younger son, and they aided me to recover my inheritance—yes, it was mine. But I was then in the flower of my age, and had an aim in the future to pursue. I have attained this aim—I have even surpassed it; and now that I have nothing more to desire, I find myself, in my mature age, scouring the desert as I formerly scoured the sea. Why?"

The conscience of Mediana cried to him that it was in order to forget one day of his life, but at that moment he wished to remain

deaf to its voice. The moon shone upon the firearms piled in the centre of the camp, and cast its light upon sixty men inured to peril and fatigue, and who laughed at heat and thirst. In the distance, a luminous vapour rested upon the mountains beyond which lay the Golden Valley.

"Why?" repeated Don Estevan; "because there remains to me still an immense treasure and a vast kingdom to conquer."

The eyes of Mediana sparkled with pride; then this expression passed away, and he fixed on the horizon a melancholy look.

"And yet," continued he, "what of this treasure shall I keep for myself? Nothing. The crown will be placed on the head of another, and I shall not even have a son or any descendant bearing the name of Mediana, who one day might bow before my portrait and say, 'This man could be tempted neither by gold nor by a throne.' But they will say it of me now, and is not that enough?"

At this moment Pedro Diaz raised the door

of the tent, and said, "You sent for me, Señor Don Estevan?"

"I wish to speak to you of important things, which I could not do yesterday, and ought to do to-day. I have some questions to ask; and although this is the hour for repose, they must not be adjourned. If I do not deceive myself, Diaz, you are one of those men who repose only when they have nothing better to do. The ambitious are such," added Don Estevan, with a smile.

"I am not ambitious, señor," replied the adventurer, quietly.

"You are so, without knowing it, Diaz; and I will prove it to you presently. But first, tell me what you think of this distant firing?"

"Men meet on the sea, whose surface is incomparably more extensive than that of this desert; it is not astonishing that they should meet here. Travellers and Indians have encountered one another, and are fighting."

"That is what I think. One more question,

and then we will return to the first subject which I have at heart. Has Cuchillo returned?"

"No, señor; and I much fear that we have lost the guide who has conducted us till now."

"And to what do you attribute this strange absence?" asked Don Estevan, with an anxious look.

"Probably he has gone too far upon the track of the Apaches, and has been surprised by them. In that case his absence may prove eternal, in spite of the fires which we have lighted for two days to show him our encampment."

"Is that really your idea?" said the chief, looking fixedly at Diaz.

"It is; although, to say the truth, Cuchillo is one of those people whom one is rarely wrong in accusing of perfidy; but I do not see what object he could have in betraying us?"

Don Estevan pointed to the fog which hid

the tops of the mountains in the horizon. "The neighbourhood of those mountains," said he, "might explain the absence of Cuchillo." Then, with a changed tone, "Are our men still of the same mind?"

"Yes, señor, and have more confidence than ever in the chief who watches while they sleep, and fights like the humblest of them."

"I have battled in many parts of the world," said Don Estevan, sensible to praise, the sincerity of which he believed in, "and I have rarely commanded men more determined than these. Would they were five hundred instead of sixty, for then, on the return of this expedition, my projects would be easy of accomplishment."

"I am ignorant what these projects are, of which you now speak to me for the first time," said Diaz, in a reserved tone. "But perhaps Don Estevan thinks me ambitious only because he does me the honour to judge me by himself."

"It is possible, friend Diaz," replied Don Estevan, smiling; "the first time I saw you I thought that your mind was of the same stamp as my own. We are made to understand each other, I am sure."

The Mexican had all the vivacious intelligence of his country; he had judged Don Estevan, but he waited for him to take the initiative. He therefore bowed and kept silence.

The Spaniard pushed open the curtains of the tent, and, pointing once more to the horizon, "Another day's march," said he, "and we shall encamp at the foot of those mountains."

"Yes; we are scarcely six leagues distant."

"And do you know what is below that mass of fog which crowns their top?"

"No," replied the Mexican.

Don Estevan cast upon Diaz a look which seemed as if meant to penetrate his soul, at the moment of revealing a secret until then so carefully kept. The Spaniard wished to assure

himself that the confidant he was about to choose was worthy of his confidence. The honest look of Diaz—on whose countenance could be traced none of that cupidity which spurred on his companions—re-assured him, and he went on :—

"Well, it is towards those mountains that we have been marching. I shall now tell you why I have directed the expedition to this place, as the pilot conducts the ship to some point in the ocean known only to himself; this evening you shall read my mind clearly. That mass of fog, which the sun itself will not wholly disperse, serves as a veil to treasures which have been amassing, perhaps, from the beginning of the world. For centuries the rains have been washing them into the plains: the whites only suspected, and the Indians spared them; to-morrow they shall be ours! This has been my aim. Well, Diaz! do you not fall on your knees and thank God for being one of those called to share in these treasures?"

"No," replied Diaz, simply; "cupidity would not have made me brave the dangers that a wish for revenge has done. I would have sought from the work of my arms what others seek by easier, if by less sure methods. But the Indians have ravaged my fields, pillaged my flocks, and murdered my father and brothers. Of my people I alone escaped. Since that time I have made fierce war upon the savages, have slain many, have sold their sons by dozens, and it is still the hope of vengeance which brings me here, neither ambition nor cupidity. But I love my country, and all that I should care for riches would be to enable me to make a last effort against that distant congress which tyrannizes over but cannot protect us."

"Good! friend Diaz!" cried the Spaniard, holding out his hand to the adventurer, and then added with vehemence—

"Strong by the aid of this gold, I will confide my plans to those sixty men now buried in sleep. On our return, our numbers will swell

like the stream which widens as it flows, and we shall shake off the yoke of a capital—which is capable only of constantly changing its men and its principles."

Don Estevan had already noticed, in former conversations with Diaz, his great hatred of the federal system; but wishing to be sure whether or not it was founded on personal motives, he continued—

"The congress is very far from you, and the government of Mexico has neither troops nor money to protect provinces so distant as yours. Is that the only reproach you have to make to it?"

"The only reproach! No. Independence is for us but an empty name, and we have to bear only the burden of a distant government."

Don Estevan now unveiled to Diaz the project which he had discussed with the Senator. Then passing from principles to persons, he named the King, Don Carlos, as him whom they were to introduce.

"A king! King Charles! so be it!" replied Diaz, "but we shall have many obstacles to overcome."

"Less than you imagine, Diaz. Gold will level all obstacles, and to-morrow we shall gather it by handfuls. We will pave the way to the new kingdom with gold, and pay largely the founders and guardians of a throne which will want only its king."

Thus, as he had promised his master, the bold partisan laid, even in the desert, the foundation of a future dynasty. What the influence of the Senator was to effect in the congress, that of a man renowned by his exploits was to obtain from his equals.

After this conversation Diaz retired to seek repose from his fatigues, and Don Estevan accompanied him out of the tent. The latter threw around him a glance of tranquil pride; all obstacles were surmounted, the incessant vigilance of the Indians had been eluded, thanks to Diaz, and an immense treasure, untouched since the

commencement of the world, awaited only the hands which were about to be extended to seize it.

"See!" said he, "from those will rise the elements of a new kingdom, and our names will belong to history, Now, I have but one fear—that is, treachery on the part of Cuchillo—and you will share this fear with me when you hear that it is he who sold me the secret of this golden deposit."

Diaz was looking earnestly at the plain.

"There!" cried he, "I see a man approaching at full gallop; it is Gayferos or Cuchillo!"

"Pray God it be the latter," said Don Estevan. "I prefer having him near rather than far from my sight."

"I think I recognize his grey horse."

In a minute, indeed, they recognized Cuchillo himself.

"To arms! to arms!" cried the guide, "here are the Indians," and he rushed pre-

cipitately through the opening made for him by the sentinels.

"Cuchillo! the Indians! both names of bad augury," said Don Estevan, as he turned towards his companion.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ATTACK.

At the cry of Cuchillo, which resounded throughout the camp, the Spaniard and Diaz exchanged looks of intelligence.

"It is strange that the Indians should have found our trail again?" said Don Estevan, interrogatively.

"Very strange," replied Diaz, and without saying another word, both descended from the eminence on which they stood.

The camp was already in motion, and confusion reigned everywhere; there was a general movement among these intrepid men,

who were accustomed to such surprises, and who had already, more than once, measured their strength with their implacable enemies. Each armed hastily, but soon the tumult subsided, and all stationed themselves at the posts assigned to them in case of attack. The first who interrogated Cuchillo were the shepherd and Baraja.

"Unless you drew the Indians on to our track, how could they have discovered us?" said the former, with a suspicious look.

"Certainly it was I," replied Cuchillo, impudently. "I should have liked to have seen you pursued by a hundred of these demons, and whether you would not, like me, have galloped to the camp to seek an asylum?"

"In such a case," replied Benito, severely, "a man, to save his companions, does not fly, but gives up his life sooner than betray them. I should have done so."

"Every one in his own way," replied Cuchillo; "but I have an account to render only to the chief, and not to his servants."

"Yes," murmured the other, "a coward and a traitor can but commit baseness and perfidies."

"Are the Indians numerous?" asked Baraja.

"I had not time to count them; all that I know is, that they must be near."

And crossing the camp, he proceeded to where Don Estevan—after having attended to the most important precautions—stood at the door of his tent waiting for him. As Cuchillo went on, without replying to any of the questions with which he was assailed, a man advanced with a lighted torch in his hand to set fire to the fagots piled in various places, but Don Estevan cried—

"Not yet; it is perhaps a false alarm, and until we have the certainty of attack we must not light up the camp to betray ourselves."

At the words "false alarm," a smile played over Cuchillo's features.

"However," added Don Estevan, "let

every one saddle his horse and be prepared." Then he returned to his tent, making a sign to Diaz to accompany him.

"That means, friend Baraja," said Benito, "that if the order is given to light the fires, we are sure to be attacked—at night too; it is terrible."

"Who knows that better than I," said Baraja, "have you ever been present at such a thing?"

"Never; that is why I dread it so much."

"Well, if you had, you would dread it more."

Cuchillo, as he drew near the tent, arranged his countenance, and threw back his long hair—as though the wind had blown it about in his rapid flight—and then entered the tent like a man out of breath, and pretending to wipe the perspiration from his forehead. Oroche had glided in with Diaz.

Cuchillo's story was brief; in reconnoitering the places towards which the expedition

should advance, he had gone farther than was prudent.

Diaz interrupted him.

"I had taken such precautions to deceive the Indians by false tracks," said he, "I had so misled them, that you must have quitted the line of march and gone from right to left."

"Yes," replied the outlaw, "I lost my way, deceived by the monotony of these endless plains, where each hillock resembles the other."

"What!" cried Diaz, ironically. "Had a dweller in cities been so deceived, it might be believed; but you—fear must have thrown a mist before your eyes!"

"Fear!" replied Cuchillo; "I know it no more than you do."

"Then you must be growing shortsighted, Señor Cuchillo."

"However it happened, I lost myself; and but for the column of smoke, I should not have regained my way so quickly. I was,

however, forced to make a circuit on perceiving a party of Indians, and only owe the start I have got upon them to the speed of my good horse."

As he spoke, Don Estevan frowned more than once. Oroche left the tent, but immediately re-entering, said,—

"The Indians are there! Look at those black shadows on the plain over which the moon throws a distant light; those are men sent to reconnoitre our encampment.

Over the sand of the desert they could, indeed, see men on horseback advancing, and then disappearing in the shadows of the sand heaps.

Pedro Diaz consulted an instant with Don Estevan, and then cried loudly,—

"Light the fires everywhere! we must count our enemies."

A few minutes after a red light, almost as bright as the sun, lit up the whole camp, and showed the adventurers at their post, rifles in hand; while the horses stood saddled and

bridled, only waiting for their riders in case of a sortie being necessary. At the same time Don Estevan's tent was struck, and a calm succeeded to the tumult.

The desert was silent also; the moon no longer shone on the Indians, who had all disappeared like a bad dream chased away by the return of morning. It was a dead silence—the precursor of the storm—and there seemed in this silence something fearful. It did not announce one of those surprises in which an enemy, inferior in number, disguises his weakness under the impetuosity of his attack, and is ready to run if he is resisted: it was the respite before the combat, granted by pitiless enemies, preparing for a deadly struggle.

"Yes, trust to me," said old Benito to Baraja, "in a quarter of an hour you will hear the howlings of these red devils sound in your ears like the trumpets of the last judgment."

"Carramba! you are the most skilled man

about tigers and Indians that I ever met with, but you might be more consoling. I wish to God I could doubt the truth of your words!"

"There are some things always easy to foresee," continued the old man. "One may predict to the traveller who goes to sleep in the bed of a torrent that he will be carried away by the waters; and that Indians who have discovered their enemies will draw off a little, and count their men before making an attack. One may also predict that several of them will utter their death-cry, as many among us will have to say their last prayer; but who those will be no one can say. Do you know any prayers for the dying, Señor Baraja?"

"No," replied the latter, dolefully.

"I am sorry for that; those are little services that friends may render each other, and if I had the grief, as is very possible, of seeing you first scalped and then murdered——"

Further conversation was interrupted by

outcries which seemed drawing near to the camp. In spite of the terrifying words of the old shepherd, his *sang-froid* in the greatest perils, and his resolution, full of a consoling fatalism, sustained the more wavering courage of Baraja.

As he shuddered at the horrible sounds—which must be heard to be appreciated—he cast upon Benito a glance, in order to catch from him a little of his philosophy. For the first time a cloud of sadness appeared on the ex-herdsman's brow, and his eyes looked as though tears stood in them. Baraja was struck by the change, and laid his hand upon the old man's arm. Benito raised his head.

"I understand you," said he, "but man has his moments of weakness. I am like him who is called from his hearth by the sound of the trumpet at a time he least thought to quit it. Amidst those howls I hear from above the sound of the last trumpet calling me, and, although I am old, it grieves me to go. I leave neither wife nor children to regret, nor those

who would weep for me; but there is an old companion of my solitary life from whom I cannot separate without grief. It is at least a consolation for the Indian warrior to know that his war-horse will share his tomb, and to believe that he shall find him again in the land of spirits. How many times have we scoured the woods and the plains together! How often have we borne together heat, hunger, and thirst! This old and faithful friend is my horse, as you may have guessed. I give him to you, friend Baraja. Treat him kindly —love him as I love him, and he will love you as he loves me. His companion was killed by a tiger, and he will now be left alone."

So saying, the old man pointed to a noble courser, champing his bit proudly, among the other horses. He then went towards him, caressed him, and, this moment of weakness over, his countenance recovered its habitual serenity. As he recovered his calmness, he renewed his predictions, careless of the terror he excited in others.

"Listen!" said he to Baraja; "to recompense you for the care you will take of my old friend, I shall teach you, while there is still time, a verse of the psalm for the dying, that may serve you as——"

"Well!" said Baraja, as he did not go on, "what more terrifying things have you to say?"

Benito did not reply, but his companion felt him press his arm convulsively, and then the sight which struck Baraja was more terrible than any answer. The old man's eyes were rolling wildly, and he was vainly trying to stanch the blood which flowed from a wound made by an arrow that had just pierced his throat.

He fell, crying, "What is ordained must happen. No," added he, repulsing the assistance that Baraja was endeavouring to render him, "my hour is come—remember—my old friend——" and the flowing blood cut short his speech.

At that moment the best mounted among the Indians showed themselves in the moon-

light. Travellers who have met only with civilized Indians can with difficulty form any idea of the savage tribes. Nothing less resembled those degenerate Indians than these unconquered sons of the desert; who—like the birds of prey, wheeling in the air before pouncing on their victims—rode howling around the camp. Their figures, hideously marked with paint, were visible from time to time; their long hair streaming in the wind, their cloaks of skins floating in their rapid course, and their piercing cries of defiance and bravado, giving them the appearance of demons, to whom they have justly been compared.

There were few among the Mexicans who had not some revenge to take on these indefatigable spoilers, but none of them were animated by such deadly hatred as Pedro Diaz. The sight of his enemies produced on him the effect that scarlet does on a bull, and he could scarcely refrain from indulging in one of those exploits which had rendered his name formid-

able to their tribes. But it was necessary to set an example of discipline, and he curbed his impatience. Besides, the moment of attack could not be far off, and the superior position of the gold-seekers compensated for the inequality of their numbers.

After having assigned to each his post behind the entrenchments, Don Estevan placed on the rising ground, where his tent had stood, those of his men whose rifles carried farthest, or whose sight was the best, and the fires gave light enough for their aim. As for himself, his post was everywhere.

The piercing eyes of the Indians, and the report of those who had preceded them, had doubtless instructed them as to the position of the whites. For a moment an indecision seemed to reign among them, but the truce did not last long. After a short interval of silence, a hundred voices at once shrieked out the war-cry; the earth trembled under an avalanche of galloping horses; and amidst a shower of balls, stones, and arrows, the camp was sur-

rounded on three sides by a disorderly multitude. But a well-sustained fire proceeded from the top of the hill.

Under this murderous discharge, riderless horses were seen galloping over the plain, and riders disengaging themselves from their wounded steeds. Before long, however, the combat became one of hand to hand; the Mexicans behind their carts, the Indians trying to scale them.

Oroche, Baraja, and Pedro Diaz pressed one against the other, sometimes retiring to avoid the long lances of their enemies—sometimes advancing and striking in their turn—encouraging each other, and never pausing but to glance at their chief. As already stated, the report had vaguely spread that he knew the secret of immense riches, and cupidity supplied to Oroche and Baraja the place of enthusiasm.

"Carramba!" cried Baraja, "a man possessing such a secret should be invulnerable."

"Immortal!" said Oroche, "or only die after——"

A blow from a hatchet on his head cut short his words. He fell to the ground, and but for the solidity of his hat, and the thickness of his hair, all had been over with him. His adversary, carried away by the violence of his own blow, placed his hand for support on the shafts of the cart which separated them. Diaz immediately seized the Indian's arm, and leaning on the nave of the wheel, dragged him towards him with such force that he fell off his horse into the camp, and, almost before he touched the ground, the Mexican's sword severed his head from his body.

Useless now on their elevated position—for the *melée* was so thick that their shots might have been as fatal to friends as foes—the sharpshooters had come down and mingled with the other combatants.

In the corner of the intrenchments where they stood, Don Estevan and Cuchillo had to sustain an attack not less furious. The first, while he defended himself, yet cast an eye

over the whole of the intrenchments; but it was with the greatest difficulty that amidst the tumult he could make heard his orders and advice. More than once his double-barrelled rifle of English make—and which he loaded and discharged with wonderful rapidity—stayed the knife or axe which was menacing one of his men—a feat which was greeted each time with loud hurrahs. He was, in a word, what the adventurers had seen him from the beginning of this dangerous campaign, the chief who thought of all, and the chief who feared nothing.

Accompanied by his horse, which followed his movements with the intelligence of a spaniel, Cuchillo stood behind the chief—as much out of the way as possible—with more prudence than bravery. He seemed to be following with an anxious eye the chances of attack and defence; when all at once he tottered as though struck by a mortal wound, and fell heavily behind the carts. This incident passed almost unperceived amidst the

confusion—everyone being in so much danger as to be able to think only of himself.

"There is a coward the less," said Don Estevan coldly, while Cuchillo's horse drew near him with a terrified air.

For some minutes Cuchillo remained motionless; then, little by little, he raised his head, and cast around him a glance which seemed undimmed by the approach of death. A few minutes after, he rose on his feet, like a man to whom death lends some strength at the last, and, apparently mortally hurt, his hand on his breast, as though endeavouring to retain the spark of life ready to escape, tottered backwards, and then fell again some way off. His horse followed him once more; and then, if everyone had not been too much occupied, they might have seen the outlaw rolling over and over towards an open place in the intrenchments. He then stopped again; and finally glided under the cart-wheels out of the camp.

There he rose upon his legs as firm as ever,

while a smile of joy played over his lips. The darkness and the tumult favoured his manœuvre. He silently unfastened the iron chains of two carts, and opened a passage. He whistled, and his horse glided after him; in a second he was in the saddle, almost without touching the stirrup; when, after a moment's thought, he spurred on the animal, who set off like the wind, and horse and rider soon disappeared in the darkness.

On both sides of the intrenchment corpses covered the ground; half burnt-out piles of wood cast their red light upon the bloody scenes of this struggle; the shouts of enemies, the repeated discharge of firearms, and the whistling of bullets followed each other uninterruptedly. The hideous figures of the Indians looked more hideous still in the strange light.

One point in the intrenchment had given way before the incessant attacks; and here, dead or wounded, its defenders had yielded to enemies who seemed to swarm from the

ground. At this point there was an instant of horrible confusion. A *pêle-mêle* of bodies interlaced, over which appeared the plumes of the Indian warriors. Soon, however, the line of the adventurers, broken for an instant, reformed before a group of Indians who were rushing like wild beasts into the middle of camp.

Oroche and Baraja left the point which they were still defending, and found themselves face to face with their enemies, this time with nothing to separate them. Amidst the group of Indians, whose lances and hatchets fell indiscriminately upon horses, mules, and men, the chief was recognizable by his vast height, the painting of his face, and his great strength.

It was the second time that he had faced the whites since the commencement of the campaign, and his name was known to them.

"Here, Diaz," cried Baraja, "here is the *Spotted Cat!*"

At the name of Diaz, which had already reached him, the Indian chief looked round

for him who bore it, with eyes which seemed to dart flames, and raised his lance to strike Diaz, when a blow from Oroche's knife wounded his horse. The Indian, thrown to the ground, let fall his lance. Diaz seized it, and while the chief raised himself on one knee and endeavoured to draw his sword, the lance which he had dropped pierced his naked breast, and came out between his shoulders. Although mortally wounded, the Indian uttered no cry, his eyes never lost their haughty menace, and his face expressed only rage.

"The Spotted Cat dies not so easily," said he, and with a vigorous hand he seized the wood of the lance still held by Diaz. A fierce struggle ensued, but at every effort of the Indian to draw Diaz towards him, and envelop him in a last deadly clasp, the murdering lance pierced farther and farther. Soon his strength failed, and, violently torn from his body, the bloody weapon remained in the hands of Diaz. The Indian fell back, gave one glance of defiance, and then lay motionless upon the earth.

Their chief fallen, the others soon shared the same fate, while their companions vainly tried to force the line a second time. Victims of their temerity, the Indians, without asking for a mercy which they never showed, fell, like their chief, facing the enemy, and surrounded by the corpses of those who had preceded them in their journey to the land of spirits.

Of all the savages in the camp, but one remained. He looked round him for a minute with eyes fierce as those of the hunted tiger; then, instead of seeking to hide his presence, he uttered anew his war-cry, but it was confounded with those from without—and profiting by a moment of confusion, during which the adventurers, attacked from without, left the breach almost clear—he caused his horse to leap over, and found himself once more among his own people.

Pedro Diaz alone saw him, and regretted his prey, but the implacable enemy of the Indians never indulged in sterile regrets. He was mounted on the war-horse presented to

him by Don Augustin Peña. From his left hand hung by the sword knot a long Toledo rapier, with the Spanish device :—

> Do not draw me without cause,
> Or sheathe me without honour.

The blade was red with blood. Diaz shaded his eyes with his right hand, and tried to pierce the distant obscurity. All at once he perceived, at the end of the luminous zone projected, by the fires, the man he was seeking. He was making furious evolutions on his horse, and uttering shouts of defiance. Diaz remembered the speech of the haciendado about the horse he had given him—"The Indian whom you pursue must be mounted on the wings of the wind if you do not catch him," and he resolved to make the attempt. The noble animal, excited by the spur, leaped over the intrenchments overthrown by the Indians, and the two were soon side by side. The Indian brandished his hatchet, Diaz his sword, and for some seconds there was a trial of agility, courage, and address. Each sus-

tained his country's reputation, but the Indian's hatchet broke to pieces the sword of the Mexican. The two combatants then seized one another round the body and tried to drag each other from their horses, but, like centaurs, each seemed to form a part of the animal he bestrode.

At last Diaz disengaged himself from his adversary's clasp, and backed his horse, still facing the Indian. Then, when he was a little way off, he caused his horse to rear so furiously that the animal seemed for a moment to be raised over the Indian. At the same moment Diaz lifted his right leg, and with a blow from the large heavy iron-bound stirrup, broke his adversary's skull, whom his horse carried away dead from the spot.

This last magnificent exploit seemed to end the battle; some arrows flew harmlessly around Diaz, who was welcomed back with shouts of triumph by his companions.

"Poor Benito!" cried Baraja; "may God rest his soul, I regret even his terrific histories."

"What is still more to be regretted," interrupted Oroche, "is the death of the illustrious Cuchillo, the guide of the expedition."

"Your ideas are still confused, from the blow you received on your head," said Diaz, as he tried the flexibility of a new sword. "But for the illustrious Cuchillo, as you call him, we should not have lost to-night at least twenty brave comrades. Cuchillo, unluckily, died a day too late, and I cannot say 'God rest *his* soul.'"

Meanwhile, the Indians were deliberating. The last exploit of Diaz, the death that so many of their party had met with in the camp, and those killed by the firing, had thinned their ranks.

The Indian never persists in a hopeless struggle; a singular mixture of prudence and contempt of life characterizes this singular race, and prudence counselled them to retreat; they did so, as precipitately as they had attacked.

But the tactics of the white men were dif-

ferent; they were anxious to profit by a victory the fame of which would penetrate to the furthest end of the desert, and render their future more secure. Therefore, an order to pursue the fugitives, given by Don Estevan, was received with acclamations. Twenty cavaliers instantly rushed forward, Pedro Diaz among the foremost. Sword in one hand, and lazo and bridle in the other, he was soon out of sight.

Those who remained behind, although nearly all more or less wounded, occupied themselves first with reconstructing the intrenchment, in case of any new attack; then, overwhelmed with fatigue, hunger, and thirst, after clearing the camp of the dead bodies which encumbered it, they lay down on the earth, still wet with blood, to seek for repose.

CHAPTER XIV.

AFTER THE FIGHT.

In the calm which succeeded to the noise of the combat, a single man rose slowly up, and by the light of a torch which he held, examined all the corpses lying at his feet, as if seeking to identify the livid or bloody faces of the dead. Sometimes the light fell on the strange paint of an Indian face, and the pale one of a white man, lying side by side in an eternal sleep; occasionally, a deep groan proceeded from some one who was wounded, but the seeker did not appear to find what he sought.

All at once, amidst the silence, a weak voice

attracted his attention, and he tried in the half-light to discover whence the sound proceeded. The feeble movement of a hand guided him, and he approached the dying man—in whom he immediately recognized Benito.

"Ah! it is you, my poor Benito," said he, with a look of profound pity.

"Yes," replied the old shepherd, "it is old Benito, dying in the desert, where he has nearly always lived. As for me—I know not who you are; my eyes are dim. Is Baraja living?"

"I trust so; he is now pursuing the Indians, and will return in time, I hope, to bid you a last adieu."

"I doubt it," replied Benito; "I wished to teach him a verse of the hymn for the dying. I can no longer remember it now. Do you not know something?"

"Not a word."

"Ah! I must do without it," said Benito, whose accustomed stoicism did not forsake

him even at that moment. Then, in a still more feeble voice, he added, "I have bequeathed to Baraja—an old companion—an old friend; whoever you may be, recommend him to observe my last request, to love him as I did."

"A brother, doubtless."

"Better than that; my horse."

"I shall remind him—do not fear."

"Thank you," said the old man. "As for myself, I have finished my travels. The Indians did not kill me when they took me prisoner in my youth—now they have killed me in my old age, without taking me prisoner. That—" he stopped, and then added some words in so low a tone that they did not reach the ear of the listener. He spoke no more; those were his last words, for death had abruptly ended his speech.

"He was a brave man—peace be with him!" said the seeker, who then continued his search, until at last, fatigued by its uselessness, he returned with an anxious look to

his place; and after he had gone, the silence of death seemed to pervade the camp.

Before long, however, a confused noise of voices and horses' feet indicated the return of the adventurers who had started in pursuit of the Indians, and by the doubtful light of the half-extinct fires they entered the camp.

The same man who had been recently inspecting the dead went out to meet them. While some of them were dismounting to open a passage through the barricades, Pedro Diaz advanced towards him, a stream of blood flowing from a wound in his forehead.

"Señor Don Estevan," said he, "we have not been lucky in our pursuit. We have but wounded one or two of the Indians, and have lost one of our own men. However, I bring you a prisoner; do you wish to interrogate him?"

So saying, Diaz detached his lazo from the saddle-bow, and pointed to a mass held in its noose. It was an Indian, who, pitilessly dragged along over the sand and stones, had left

behind, at every step, pieces of flesh, and now scarcely retained any vestige of humanity.

"He was alive when I took him, however," cried Diaz; "but it is just like these dogs of Indians, he must have died in order not to tell anything."

Without replying to this ferocious jest, Don Estevan signed to Diaz to accompany him to a place where they might converse without being overheard. When the new comers had lain down and silence reigned anew, Don Estevan began:—

"Diaz," said he, "we are close on the end of our expedition; to-morrow, as I told you, we shall encamp at the foot of those mountains; but, in order that success may crown our efforts, treason must not throw obstacles in our way. It is on this subject that I wish to consult you to-night. You have known Cuchillo long, but not so long as I have; and, certainly, not as thoroughly. From his earliest youth he has always betrayed those to whom he appeared most devoted. I know not which

of all the vices with which he is endowed has the ascendant; but, in a word, the sinister look of his face is but a feeble reflection of the blackness of his soul. It was he who sold to me the secret of the rich and mysterious placer to which I am leading you—and of this secret he had made himself the sole master, by murdering the friend who had freely confided it to him, and who thought to find him a faithful companion in his dangers.

"I have ever, therefore, kept a watchful eye over him. His disappearance for the last two days alarmed me, but it might have been the result of an accident common in these deserts. The attack, however, from which we have so narrowly escaped has confirmed my suspicions. He has advanced under our protection, until we have reached the place where he would be able to seize a part of these immense treasures. He had need of auxiliaries in order to murder our sixty men, and the Indians who have attacked us were but his instruments."

"Indeed," replied Diaz, "his report seemed to me suspicious. But the simplest method will be to hold a court-martial, interrogate him, and if he be convicted of treason, let us shoot him at once."

"At the commencement of the attack, I assigned him a post near me, in order to watch him more easily. I saw him totter, and then fall, apparently mortally wounded, and I was glad to be rid of a traitor and a coward. But I have just turned over and examined all the dead, and Cuchillo is not amongst them. It is therefore urgent that, without loss of time, we should follow him; he cannot be far off. You are accustomed to this sort of expedition; we must, without delay, set off in pursuit of him, and execute prompt justice on a villain whose life must pay for his treachery."

Diaz appeared to reflect for a moment, and then said, "To trace him can neither be tedious nor difficult. Cuchillo must have gone towards the Golden Valley—therefore in that direction we must seek him."

"Go rest for an hour, for you must be worn out," said the chief "Ah! Diaz, if all these men were like you, how easy our path would be—gold in one hand, and the sword in the other."

"I have only done my duty," said Diaz, simply.

"Say to our men that it is necessary for us to reconnoitre the environs of the camp, and tell the sentinels to keep strict watch until our return, and then we shall proceed towards the valley."

"Cuchillo must certainly be there, and we shall catch him, either going or returning."

"We shall find him in the valley," said Don Estevan. "When you have seen it, you will find it a place that a man like Cuchillo could not make up his mind to leave."

Diaz departed to execute his orders, and Don Estevan caused his tent to be pitched again, that even in his absence his starry banner might float over the camp as a sign of his protective authority. This done, he threw

himself on his couch, and slept the sleep of a soldier after a day of fighting and fatigue.

Little more than an hour after, Diaz stood before him.

"Señor Don Estevan," said he, "all is prepared for starting."

The chief rose and found his horse awaiting him, ready saddled.

"Diaz," said he, "ask the sentinels if Gayferos has returned."

Diaz questioned one of the men, who replied, "The poor fellow will probably never return. The Indians must have surprised and killed him before attacking us, and that probably was the cause of the firing that we heard in the afternoon."

"I fear it is but too certain that he has been murdered," replied Diaz; "but as for the firing that we heard, I believe that had a different origin."

Don Estevan now mounted his horse, and the two set off in the direction of the mountains.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ISLET.

WHILE the Indians, united in council, were deliberating on the means of attacking the camp of the gold-seekers, let us see how the three men on the island were occupied.

It was about four o'clock, and the fog was beginning to rise slowly from the water. Willows and aspens grew on the shores of the river Gila, within rifle-range of the little island, and so near the water that their roots were in the river. The spaces between the trees were filled up by vigorous osier and other shoots; but just in front of the island was a large open space. This had been made

by the troops of wild horses and buffaloes that came down to drink at the river; and through this opening any one on the island could see clearly over the plain.

The little island had been formed originally by trees that had taken root in the bed of the river; other trees, some green, and others without branches or foliage, had rested against these, and their roots had become interlaced. Since then many summers and winters must have passed; and grasses and sedges, detached from the banks by the water, had filled up the interstices. Then the dust, brought there by the wind, had covered these with a crust of earth, and formed a kind of solid ground for the floating island. Plants had grown along the banks; the trunks of the willows had sent forth vigorous shoots, and, with the reeds, had surrounded the island with a fringe of verdure. The island was only a few feet in diameter; but a man lying, or even kneeling, upon it, was completely hidden by the willow-shoots.

The sun was going down, and a little shade was thrown by the leaves and trees; in this shade was stretched the form of Fabian asleep. Bois-Rose seemed to be watching over his sleep, hastily taken after the fatigues of a long march, while Pepé refreshed himself by plunging in the water. While Fabian sleeps, we shall raise the veil by which the young Count hid from the eyes of his two friends his most secret and dearest thoughts.

After his fall into the torrent, Pepé had forgotten that the enemy on whom he had sworn vengeance was escaping, and both he and Bois-Rose had thought only of rendering prompt assistance to Fabian. On returning to consciousness, Fabian's first thought was to resume his interrupted pursuit. The acquisition of the Golden Valley, and even the remembrance of Doña Rosarita, were forgotten in the ardent wish of revenging his mother.

Pepé, on his side, was not the man to draw back from his vow; and as for Bois-Rose, his

whole affections were centred in his two companions, and he would have followed them to the end of the world. Their first failure, far from discouraging them, did but excite their ardour; in hatred as in love, obstacles are always a powerful stimulant to vigorous minds. The pursuit had gradually presented a double object to Fabian; it brought him near to the Golden Valley in the desert, and he nourished a vague hope that the place pointed out to him was not the same as that which the expedition led by Antonio de Mediana proposed to conquer.

Fabian said to himself that the daughter of Don Augustin, doubtless, only yielded obedience to the ambitious views of her father, and that it might yet be easy for him, noble and rich, to win the day against such a rival as Tragaduros.

Still, discouragement often seized upon Fabian; he loved the daughter of the haciendado with his whole soul; and the thought of owing her love only to the treasures that he

might possess, distressed him. Moreover, he felt that the ardent and jealous affection of the Canadian had founded on him the sole aim of his life, and that, like the eagle who carries away his young one, and places it in an eyrie inaccessible to the hand of man, Bois-Rose, who had for ever quitted civilized life, wished to make of him his inseparable companion in the desert; and that to disappoint the old man would be to throw a shadow over his whole future life. As yet, no confidence as to their future had been exchanged between them; but, in face of a love that he believed hopeless, and of the ardent though secret wishes of the man who now acted as a father to him, and who would half break his heart at a separation, Fabian had generously and silently sacrificed his tastes and hopes that would not die. He who had but to hold out his hand to seize the things that the whole world desires—riches, titles, and honours—was like one whose life, tortured by an unhappy love, disclaiming the future, seeks

within the cloister forgetfulness of the past. For Fabian de Mediana the desert was the cloister; and his mother once revenged, it only remained to him to bury himself in it for ever. Sad and inefficacious, as a remedy, would be solitude, with its mysterious voice, and the ardent contemplations that it awakens, for a passion so profoundly awakened in the young heart of Fabian.

One single hope remained to him,—that amidst the ever-renewed dangers of an adventurous life, the day was not far distant when his life would be cut short in some contest with the Indians, or in one of those desperate attempts that he meditated against the murderer of his mother. He had carefully hidden from the Canadian the love that he buried in the depths of his heart; and it was in the silence of the night that he dared to look into his own bosom. Then, like the light which shines in the horizon above great cities, and which the traveller contemplates with joy, a radiant and cherished image rose before his

eyes in the desert, standing on that breach in the wall of the hacienda, where his last souvenirs carried him. But, during the day, the heroic young man tried to hide, under an apparent calm, the melancholy that devoured him. He smiled, with sad resignation, at those plans for the future which the Canadian sometimes enlarged on before him,—he so happy in having found him, and who trembled to lose again his beloved Fabian, whose hand he hoped would one day close his eyes. The blind tenderness of Bois-Rose did not divine the abyss under the calm surface of the lake, but Pepé was rather more clear-sighted.

"Well," said Pepé, after a long silence, "the inhabitants of Madrid would pay dearly for such a stream of water in the Manzanares; but we have not the less lost a day which might have brought us nearer to the Golden Valley, from which we cannot now be far distant."

"I allow that," replied Bois-Rose, "but the child," for so he called the vigorous

young man before them, "is not so accustomed as we are to long marches; and though sixty leagues in twelve days is not very much for us, it begins to tell on him. But before he has been a year with us, he will be able to walk as far as ourselves."

Pepé could not help smiling at this answer, but the Canadian did not perceive it.

"See," said the Spaniard, pointing to Fabian, "how the poor lad has changed in a few days. For my part, at his age I should have preferred the glance of a damsel and the Puerta del Sol at Madrid to all the magnificence of the desert. Fatigue alone has not produced this change in him. There is some secret which he does not tell us—but I will penetrate it one of these days," added Pepé, mentally.

At these words the Canadian turned his head quickly towards his beloved child, but a smile of joy from Fabian chased away the sudden cloud from the brow of his adoptive father. Fabian indeed smiled; he was dream-

ing that he was on his knees before Rosarita, listening to the sweet voice of the young girl, who was recounting her anguish during his long absence, and that Bois-Rose stood behind them, leaning on his rifle and blessing them both. Ah! it was only a dream.

The two hunters looked for a moment silently at the sleeper.

"There lies the last descendant of the Medianas," said Pepé, with a sigh.

"What care I for the Medianas and their powerful race?" replied the Canadian. "I know but Fabian. When I saved him, and attached myself to him as though he had been my own, did I ask about his ancestors?"

"You will wake him if you talk so loud," said Pepé; "your voice roars like a cataract."

"Why are you always recalling to me things that I do not wish to know, or rather wish to forget? I know that some years in the desert will accustom him——"

"You deceive yourself strangely, Bois-Rose, if you imagine that with the prospects that

await him in Spain, and the rights that he can claim, this young man will consent to pass his whole life in the desert. It is good for us, but not for him."

"What! is not the desert preferable to cities?" cried the old sailor, who vainly tried to conceal from himself that Pepé was right. "I undertake to make him prefer a wandering life to a settled one. Is it not for movement, for fighting, and for the powerful emotions of the desert that man is born?"

"Certainly," said Pepé, gravely, "and that is just why the towns are deserted and the deserts peopled!"

"Do not jest, Pepé; I am speaking of serious things. While I leave Fabian free to follow his own inclinations, I shall make him love this captivating life. Is not this short sleep, snatched hastily between two dangers, preferable to what one tastes after a day of idle security in the towns. You yourself, Pepé—would *you* wish to return to your own country, since you have known the charms of a wandering life?"

"There is between the heir of the Medianas," replied Pepé, "and the old coast-guard man a great difference. To him will come a fine property, a great name, and a beautiful Gothic castle, with towers like the cathedral at Burgos; while I should be sent to fish for mackarel at Ceuta—which is the most execrable life I know of, and which I should have but one chance of escaping from —that of waking some fine morning, at Tunis or Tetuan, as a slave to our neighbours the Moors. I have here, it is true, the daily chance of being scalped or burnt alive by the Indians. Still the town is worse for me—but for Don Fabian——"

"Fabian has always lived in solitude, and will, I trust, prefer the calm of the desert to the tumult of cities. How solemn and silent all is around us! See here!" and he pointed to Fabian, "how the child sleeps, softly lulled by the murmur of the waters, and by the breeze in the willows. Look there, in the horizon, at those fogs just coloured by the

sun, and that boundless space where man wanders in his primitive liberty, like the birds in the air!"

The Spaniard shook his head doubtfully, although he partook the ideas of the Canadian, and like him felt the charm of this wandering life.

"Look," continued the old hunter, "at that troop of wild horses coming down to drink before going for the night to their distant pasturage. See, how they approach, in all the proud beauty that God gives to free animals—ardent eyes, open nostrils, and floating manes! Ah! I should almost like to awake Fabian in order that he might see and admire them."

"Let him sleep, Bois-Rose; perhaps his dreams show him more graceful forms than those horses of the desert—forms such as abound in our Spanish towns, in balconies or behind barred windows."

Bois-Rose sighed, as he added—

"Yet this is a fine sight—how these noble beasts bound with joy at their liberty!"

"Yes, until they are chased by the Indians, and then they bound with terror."

"There! now they are gone, like the cloud driven by the wind!" continued the Canadian. "Now the scene changes. Look at that stag, who shows from time to time his shining eyes and black nose through the trees: he snuffs the wind, he listens. Ah! now he also approaches to drink. He has heard a noise, he raises his head; do not the drops that fall from his mouth look like liquid gold? I will wake the lad!"

"Let him sleep, I tell you; perhaps his dream now shows him black eyes and rosy lips, or some nymph sleeping on the banks of a clear stream."

The old Canadian sighed again.

"Is not the stag the emblem of independence?" said he.

"Yes, until the time when the wolves assemble to pursue and tear him to pieces. Perhaps he would have more chance of life in our royal parks. Everything to its time,

Bois-Rose; old age loves silence, youth noise."

Bois-Rose still fought against the truth. It was the drop of gall that is found at the bottom of every cup of happiness; it is not permitted that there should be perfect felicity, for it would then be too painful to die; neither is unmixed misery allowed to mortals, or it would be painful to live. The Canadian hung his head and looked sad as he glanced at the sleeping youth, while Pepé put on his buffalo-skin buskins.

"Well! what did I tell you?" said he, presently; "do you not hear from afar those howlings—I mean those barkings, for the wolves have voices like dogs when they hunt the stags. Poor stag! he is, as you said, the emblem of life in the desert."

"Shall I wake Fabian now?" said Bois-Rose.

"Yes, certainly; for after a love-dream a stag hunt is the thing most worthy of a nobleman like him, and he will rarely see such a one as this."

"He will see nothing like it in the towns," cried the Canadian, enchanted; "such scenes must make him love the desert."

And he shook the young man gently.

With head thrown back, to inhale more freely the air necessary to his lungs, the stag flew like an arrow along the plain. Behind him a hungry pack of wolves, a few white, but the greater number black, pursued him at full speed. The stag had an immense start, but on the sand-heaps, almost lost in the horizon, the piercing eye of a hunter might distinguish other wolves watching. The noble animal either did not see, or else disdained them, for he flew straight towards them. As he neared them, he halted a moment. Indeed, he found himself shut in by a circle of enemies, who constantly advanced upon him as he stopped to take breath. All at once he turned round, faced the other wolves, and tried one last effort to escape. But he could not now clear the solid masses that had formed around him, and he fell in

the midst of them. Some rolled under his feet, and two or three were tossed in the air. Then, with a wolf hanging to his flanks, bleeding and with tongue protruded, the poor animal advanced to the edge of the water, in front of the three spectators of this strange chase.

"It is magnificent!" cried Fabian, clapping his hands, and carried away by the hunter's enthusiasm, which for the time silences humanity in the hearts of men.

"Is it not fine?" cried Bois-Rose, doubly pleased—happy at Fabian's pleasure and at his own. "And we shall witness many such fine sights, my Fabian! Here you see only the worst side of these American solitudes, but when you go with Pepé and me to the great rivers and the great lakes of the north——"

"The animal has got rid of his enemy," interrupted Fabian, "he is about to spring into the river!"

The water bubbled after the leap of the stag, then a dozen times more as the wolves

followed; then amidst the foam were visible the head of the stag, and those of the wolves who were pursuing him, howling with hunger, while the more timid ones ran along the bank, uttering their lamentable howls. The stag had neared the island, when the wolves on the bank suddenly ceased their cries and fled precipitately away.

"What is that?" cried Pepé; "what causes this sudden panic?"—but no sooner had he spoken than he cried again, "Hide yourselves, in God's name! the Indians are in chase also."

Other and more formidable hunters now appeared in their turn upon the arena. A dozen of the wild horses, which they had seen before, were now seen galloping wildly over the plain, while some Indians, mounted bare-backed on their horses (having taken their saddles off for greater speed), were perched on their horses, their knees almost up to their chins, as they pursued the terrified animals. At first there were but three Indians visible,

but one by one about twenty appeared, some armed with lances, and others brandishing their lazos of plaited leather—all uttering those cries by which they express either joy or anger.

Pepé glanced at the Canadian as though to ask whether he had calculated these terrible chances when he wished to make Fabian share their adventurous career. For the first time, at such a crisis, the intrepid hunter looked deadly pale. An eloquent but sad glance was his reply to the Spaniard's mute interrogation.

"A too great affection in the heart of the bravest man," thought Pepé, "makes him tremble for him he loves more than life; and adventurers like us should have no ties. There is Bois-Rose trembling like a woman!"

However, they felt almost certain that even the practised eyes of the Indians could not discover them in their retreat; and the three men, after their first alarm had passed away, watched coolly the manœuvres of the Indians.

These continued to pursue the flying horses; the numberless obstacles so thickly strewn over the plain—the ravines, the hillocks, and the sharp-pointed cacti—could not stop them. Without slackening the impetuosity of their pace, or turning aside from any obstacle, these horsemen cleared them with wonderful address. Bold rider as he was himself, Fabian looked with enthusiasm on the astonishing agility of these wild hunters, but the precautions which they were forced to take in order to conceal themselves made the three friends lose a part of this imposing spectacle.

The vast savannas, late so deserted, were suddenly changed into a scene of tumult and confusion. The stag, returning to the bank, continued to fly, with the wolves still after him. The wild horses galloped before the Indians—whose howlings equalled that of the wolves—and described great circles to avoid the lance or the lazo, while numerous echoes repeated these various sounds.

The sight of Fabian, who followed with an

ardent eye all these tumultuous evolutions, not appearing to disquiet himself about a danger which he now braved for the first time, deprived Bois-Rose of that confidence in himself which had brought him safe and sound out of perils apparently greater than this.

"Ah!" muttered he, "these are scenes which the inhabitants of cities can never see; it is only in the desert one can meet with them."

But his voice trembled in spite of himself; and he stopped, for he felt that he would have given a year of his life that Fabian had not been present. At this moment a new subject of apprehension added to his anguish.

The scene became more solemn; for a new actor, whose *rôle* was to be short though terrible, now appeared upon it. It was a man, whom by his dress the three recognized with terror as a white man like themselves. The unlucky man, suddenly discovered in one of the evolutions of the chase, had become, in his turn, the exclusive object of pursuit. Wild horses,

wolves, the stag, had all disappeared in the distant fog. There remained only the twenty Indians, scattered over a circle of which the white man occupied the centre. For an instant the friends could see him cast around him a glance of despair and anguish. But, excepting on the river side, the Indians were everywhere. It was, therefore, in this direction that he must fly; and he turned his horse towards the opening opposite the island. But his single moment of indecision had sufficed for the Indians to get near him.

"The unhappy man is lost, and no help for it," said Bois-Rose; "he is too late now to cross the river."

"But," said Fabian, "if we can save a Christian, shall we let him be murdered before our eyes?"

Pepé looked at Bois-Rose.

"I answer for your life before God," said the Canadian, solemnly; "if we are discovered, we are but three against twenty. The life of three men—yours especially, Fabian—

is more precious than that of one; we must let this unhappy man meet his fate."

"But intrenched as we are?" persisted Fabian.

"Intrenched! do you call this frail rampart of osiers and reeds an intrenchment? Do you think these leaves are ball proof? And these Indians are but twenty now; but let one of our shots be fired at them, and you will soon see one hundred instead of twenty. May God pardon me if I am unfeeling, but it is necessary."

Fabian said no more; this last reason seemed conclusive, for, like his companions, he was ignorant that the rest of the Indians were at the camp of Don Estevan.

Meanwhile the white fled like a man the speed of whose horse is his last resource. Already they could see the terror depicted on his face, but just as he was about twenty feet from the river, the lazo of an Indian caught him, and the unlucky wretch, thrown violently from his saddle, fell upon the sand.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN INDIAN DIPLOMAT.

After the cries of triumph which announced the capture of the unlucky white man, there was a moment of profound silence. The men on the island exchanged looks of consternation and pity. "Thank God! they have not killed him!" said Fabian.

The prisoner indeed arose, although bruised with his fall, and one of the Indians disengaged him from the lazo. Bois-Rose and Pepé shook their heads.

"So much the worse for him, for his sufferings would now be over," said Pepé; "the silence of the Indians shows that each is con-

sidering what punishment to inflict. The capture of one white is more precious in their eyes than that of a whole troop of horses."

The Indians, still on horseback, surrounded the prisoner, who, casting around him a despairing glance, saw on every side only bronzed and hardened faces. Then the Indians began to deliberate.

Meanwhile, one who appeared to be the chief, and who was distinguished by his black plumes, jumped off his horse, and throwing the bridle to one of the men, advanced toward the island. Having reached the bank, he seemed to seek for footsteps on the sand. Bois-Rose's heart beat violently, for this movement appeared to show some suspicion as to their presence.

"Can this wretch," whispered he to Pepé, "smell flesh like the ogres in the fairy tales?"

"*Quien sabe*—who knows?" replied the Spaniard, in the phrase which is the common answer in his native country.

But the sand, trampled over by the wild

horses that had come to drink, showed no trace of a human foot, and the Indian walked up the stream, still apparently seeking.

"The demon has some suspicion," said Bois-Rose; "and he will discover the traces that we left half-a-mile off when we entered the bed of the river to get at this island. I told you," added he bitterly, "that we should have entered two miles higher up; but neither you nor Fabian wished it, and, like a fool, I yielded to you."

The deliberation as to the fate of the prisoner was now doubtless over, for cries of joy welcomed some proposition made by one of the Indians, But it was necessary to await the return and approbation of the chief, who was the man already known to us as the "Blackbird." He had continued his researches, and having reached the place where they had left the sand to enter the river, no longer doubted that the report brought to them had been correct; and having his own private objects, he determined to follow it.

Once assured of the presence of the three whites, he returned to his men, listened gravely to the result of their deliberations, answered in a few words, and then advanced slowly towards the river—after having given an order to five of his men, who set off at full gallop to execute it.

The aquatic plants were open in the sunshine; the breeze agitated the leaves of the osiers on the banks of the island, which was to all appearance as uninhabited as when the stream flowed only for the birds of heaven, and the buffaloes and wild horses of the plains. But an Indian could not be deceived by this apparent calm. The "Blackbird" made a speaking-trumpet of his hand, and cried in a language half-Indian, half-Spanish:—

"The white warriors of the north may show themselves; the 'Blackbird' is their friend. So, too, are the warriors he commands."

At these words, borne to them distinctly

by the wind, the Canadian pressed the arm of Pepé; both understood the mixed dialect of the Indian.

"What shall we reply?" said he.

"Nothing," answered Pepé.

The breeze which murmured through the reeds was the only answer the Indian could hear.

He went on—

"The eagle may hide his track in the air from the eye of an Apache; the salmon in the stream leaves no trace behind him; but a white man who crosses the desert is neither a salmon nor an eagle."

"Nor a gosling," murmured Pepé; "and a gosling only betrays himself by trying to sing."

The Indian listened again, but hearing no sound, continued, without showing any signs of being discouraged. "The white warriors of the north are but three against twenty, and the red warriors engage their word to be friends and allies to them."

"Wagh!" said Bois-Rose, "for what perfidy has he need of us?"

"Let him go on, and we shall hear; he has not yet finished, or I am much mistaken!"

"When the white warriors know the intentions of the 'Blackbird' they will leave their hiding-place," continued he, "but they shall hear them. The white men of the north are the enemies of those of the south—their language, their religion is different. The Apaches hold in their toils a whole camp of southern warriors."

"So much the worse for the gold-seekers," said Bois-Rose.

"If the warriors of the north will join the Indians with their long rifles, they shall share the horses and the treasures of the men of the south; the Indians and the whites will dance together round the corpses of their enemies and the ashes of their camp."

Bois-Rose and Pepé looked at each other in astonishment, and explained to Fabian the proposal made to them, but the fire of their

eyes, and their disdainful looks, showed that the noble trio had but one opinion on the subject—that of perishing rather than aiding the Indians to triumph even over their mortal enemies.

"Do you hear the miscreant?" cried Bois-Rose, using in indignation an image fit for the Indians; "he takes jaguars for jackals. Ah! if Fabian were not here, a bullet would be my answer."

Meanwhile, the Indian, feeling certain of the presence of the hunters on the island, began to lose patience—for the orders of the chiefs had been peremptory to attack the whites—but he, having his own opinions, wished to prove them right. He knew that the American or Canadian rifle never misses its aim, and three such allies seemed to him not to be despised. He therefore continued to speak:—

"The buffalo of the prairies is not more easy to follow than the white man; the track of the buffalo tells the Indian his age, his

size, and the time of his passing. There are behind the reeds of the floating island a man as strong as a bison, and taller than the tallest rifle, a warrior of mingled north and south blood, and a young warrior of the pure south, but the alliance of these two with the first indicates that they are enemies of the southern whites—for the weakest ever seek the friendship of the strongest and espouse their cause."

"The sagacity of these dogs is admirable," said Bois-Rose.

"Because they flatter you," said Pepé, who seemed somewhat annoyed at what the Indian had said.

"I wait for the answer of the whites," continued the Blackbird. "I hear only the sound of the river, and the wind, which says to me, 'The whites imagine a thousand errors —they believe that the Indian has eyes behind his back, that the track of the bison is invisible, and that reeds are ball proof.' The Blackbird laughs at the words of the wind."

"Ah!" said Bois-Rose, "if we had but entered two miles higher up the river!"

"A friend disdained becomes a terrible enemy," continued the chief.

"We say something similar among us," muttered Pepé.

The Blackbird now signed to the captive to approach. The latter advanced, and the chief pointed out to him the little island, and said:—"Can the rifle of the pale face send a ball into the space between those bushes?"

But the prisoner had understood only the little Spanish mixed with the Indian dialect, and he remained mute and trembling. Then the Blackbird spoke to one of his warriors, who placed in the hands of the prisoner the rifle that he had taken from him, and by gestures made him understand what was wanted of him. The unlucky man tried to take aim, but terror caused him to shake in such a fashion that his rifle was unsteady in his hands.

"If the Indian has no better way than that

to make us speak," said Pepe, "I will not say a word until to-morrow."

The white man fired indeed, but the ball, directed by his trembling hand, fell into the water some distance from the island. The Blackbird glanced contemptuously at him, and then looked around him.

"Yes," said Pepé, "seek for balls and powder among the lances and lazos of your warriors."

But as he finished this consoling reflection, the five men who had gone away returned, armed for combat with rifles and quivers full of arrows. They had been to fetch the arms which they had laid down, in order to follow the wild horses more freely. Five others now went off.

"This looks bad," said Bois-Rose.

"Shall we attack them while they are but fifteen," said Pepé.

"No, let us remain silent; he still doubts whether we are here."

"As you like."

The Indian chief now took a rifle, and advanced again to the bank.

"The hands of the Blackbird do not tremble like a leaf shaken by the wind," said he, pointing his rifle steadily towards the island. "But, before firing, he will wait, while he counts one hundred, for the answer of the whites who are hidden in the island."

"Get behind me, Fabian," said Bois-Rose.

"No, I stay here," said Fabian, decidedly. "I am younger, and it is my place to expose myself for you."

"Child! do you not see that my body exceeds yours six inches on every side, and your remaining in front is but presenting a double mark."

And without shaking a single one of the reeds around the island, he advanced and knelt before Fabian.

"Let him do it, Fabian," said Pepé. "Never had man a more noble buckler than the heart of the giant which beats in fear for you."

The Indian chief, rifle in hand, listened as he counted, but excepting the murmur of the water, a profound silence reigned everywhere.

He fired at length, and the leaves of the trees flew into the air; but as the three hunters knelt in a row, they did not present a large aim, and the ball passed at some little distance from them.

The Blackbird waited a minute, and cried again:—

"The Indian was wrong, he acknowledges his error, he will seek for the white warriors elsewhere."

"Who believes that?" said Pepé; "he is more certain than ever. He is about to leave us alone for a few minutes, until he has finished with that poor devil yonder, which will not be long—since the death of a white is a spectacle which an Indian is always in a hurry to enjoy."

"But had we not better make some effort in favour of the unlucky man?" said Fabian.

"Some unexpected circumstance may come to our assistance," replied Bois-Rose. "Whatever Pepé says, the Indians may still doubt, but if we show ourselves, all is over. To accept an alliance with these Indians, even against Don Estevan de Arechiza, would be an unworthy cowardice. What can we do?" added he, sadly.

One fear tormented him; he had seen Fabian in danger when his blood was boiling with passion, but had he the calm courage which meets death coolly? Had he the stoical resignation of which he himself had given so many proofs? The Canadian took a sudden resolution.

"Listen, Fabian," said he; "can I speak to you the language of a man? Will the words which your ears will transmit to your heart not freeze it with terror."

"Why doubt my courage?" replied Fabian, in a tone of gentle reproach. "Whatever you say, I will hear without growing pale; whatever you do, I will do also, without trembling."

"Don Fabian speaks truly, Pepé; look at his eye," said the Canadian, pressing Fabian in his arms; then he continued, solemnly:—"Never were three men in greater peril than we are now; our enemies are seven times our number; when each of us has killed six of them, there will still remain a number equal to our own."

"We have done it before," said Pepé.

"And we shall do it again," cried Fabian.

"Good, my child," said Bois-Rose, "but whatever happens, these demons must not take us alive. See, Fabian!" added the old man, in a voice that he tried to keep firm, while unsheathing a long knife, "if we were left without powder or ammunition at the mercy of these dogs, about to fall into their hands, and this poniard in my hand was our only chance, what would you say?"

"I would say, strike, father, and let us die together!"

"Yes, yes," cried the Canadian, looking with indescribable tenderness at him who

called him father, "it will be one means of never being separated." And he held out to Fabian his hand, trembling with emotion, which the latter kissed respectfully.

"Now," said Bois-Rose, "whatever happens, we shall not be separated. God will do the rest, and we shall try to save this unlucky man."

"To work, then," said Fabian.

"Not yet, my child; let us see what these red demons are about to do."

Meanwhile, the Indians had ranged themselves in two lines, and the white man was placed a little in advance of them.

"I see what they are going to do," said Bois-Rose; "they are going to try if the poor wretch's legs are better than his arms. They are about to chase him."

"How so?" said Fabian.

"They will place their captive a little in advance; then, at a given signal, he will run. Then all the Indians will run after him, lance and hatchet in hand. If the white is quick

enough to reach the river before them, we will call to him to swim to us. Some shots will protect him, and he may reach here safe and sound. But if terror paralyses his limbs, as it did his hands just now, the foremost Indian will break his head with a blow from a hatchet. In any case, we shall do our best."

At this moment, the five other Indians returned, armed from head to foot, and now joined the rest. Fabian looked with profound compassion at the unlucky white man, who, with haggard eye and features distorted by terror, waited in horrible anguish until the signal was given. But the Blackbird pointed to the bare feet of his warriors, and then to the leather buskins which protected the feet of the white man. They then saw the latter sit down and take them off slowly, as if to gain a few seconds.

"The demons," cried Fabian.

"Hush!" said Bois-Rose, "do not, by discovering yourself, destroy the last chance of life for the poor wretch!"

Fabian shut his eyes, so as not to witness the horrible scene about to take place. At length the white man rose to his feet, and the Indians stood devouring him with their looks, until the Blackbird clapped his hands together, and then the howlings which followed could only be compared to those of a troop of jaguars in pursuit of a deer. The unlucky captive ran with great swiftness, but his pursuers bounded after him like tigers. Thanks to the start which he had had, he cleared safely a part of the distance which separated him from the river; but the stones which cut his feet, and the sharp thorns of the nopals, soon caused him to slacken his pace, and one of the Indians rushed up and made a furious thrust at him with his lance. It passed between his arm and his body, and the Indian, losing his equilibrium, fell on the sand.

Gayferos, for it was he, appeared to hesitate a moment whether he should pick up the lance which the Indian had let fall, but then rapidly continued his course. That instant's

hesitation was fatal to him. All at once, amidst the cloud of dust raised by his feet, a hatchet shone over the head of the unfortunate Mexican, who was seen falling to the earth.

Bois-Rose was about to fire, but the fear of killing him whom he wished to defend stopped his hand. For a single moment the wind cleared away the dust, and he fired, but it was too late, the Indian who fell under his ball was brandishing in his hand the scalp of the unhappy man. To this unexpected shot the savages replied with howls, and then rushed away from what they believed to be only a corpse. Soon, however, they saw the dead man rise, with his head laid bare, who, after straggling a few paces, fell again, while the blood flowed in torrents from his wounds.

"Ah!" cried Bois-Rose, "if there remains to him a spark of life, and people do not die only from scalping, we shall save him yet; I swear we shall!"

CHAPTER XVII.

INDIAN CUNNING.

As the Canadian uttered the generous oath wrung from him by indignation, it seemed to him that a supplicating voice reached him. "Is not the poor wretch calling for aid?" And he raised his head from behind its shelter.

At sight of the fox-skin cap which covered the head of the giant, and of the long and heavy rifle which he raised like a willow wand, the Indians recognized one of their formidable northern enemies, and recoiled in astonishment — for the Blackbird alone had been

instructed as to whom they were seeking. Bois-Rose, looking towards the shore, now perceived the unlucky Gayferos stretching out his arms towards him, and feebly calling for help. The dying Indian still held the scalp in his clenched hand.

At this terrible spectacle, the Canadian drew himself up to his full height. "Fire on these dogs!" cried he, "and remember—never let them take you alive."

So saying, he resolutely entered the water, and any other man would have had it up to his head, but the Canadian had all his shoulders above the surface.

"Do not fire till after me," said Pepé to Fabian; "my hand is surer than yours, and my Kentucky rifle carries twice as far as your Liège gun." And he held his rifle ready to fire at the slightest sign of hostility from the Indians.

Meanwhile, Bois-Rose still advanced, the water growing gradually shallower, when an

Indian raised his rifle to fire on the intrepid hunter; but a bullet from Pepé stopped him, and he fell forward on his face.

"Now you, Don Fabian!" said Pepé, throwing himself on the ground to reload, after the American custom in such cases.

Fabian fired, but his rifle having a shorter range, the shot only drew from the Indian at whom he aimed a cry of rage. But Pepé had reloaded, and stood ready to fire again.

There was a moment's hesitation among the Indians, by which Bois-Rose profited to draw towards him the body of the unlucky Gayferos. He, clinging to his shoulders, had the presence of mind to leave his preserver's arms free; who, with his burden, again entered the water, going backwards. Then his rifle was heard, and an Indian's death-cry immediately followed. This valiant retreat, protected by Pepé and Fabian, awed the Indians, and some minutes after, Bois-Rose triumphantly placed the fainting Gayferos on the island.

"There are three of them settled for," said he, "and now we shall have a few minutes' truce. Well, Fabian, do you see the advantage of firing in file? You did not do badly for a beginner; and I can assure you that when you have a Kentucky rifle like us, you will be a good marksman." Then to Gayferos, "We came too late to save the skin of your head, my poor fellow, but console yourself, it is no such dreadful thing. I have many friends in the same condition, who are none the worse for it. Your life is saved—that is the great thing—and we shall endeavour to bind up your wounds."

Some strips torn from the shirt of Gayferos served to bind around his head a large mass of willow-leaves, crushed together and steeped in water, and concealed the hideous wound. The blood was then washed from his face.

"You see," said Bois-Rose, still clinging to the idea of keeping Fabian near him, "you must learn to know the habits of the desert,

and of the Indians. The villains, who see, by the loss of three of their men, what stuff we are made of, have retired to concoct some stratagem. You hear how silent all is after so much noise?"

The desert, indeed, had recovered its silence; the leaves only trembled in the evening breeze, and the water began to display brilliant colours in the setting sun.

"Well, Pepé, they are but seventeen now!" continued Bois-Rose, in a tone of triumph.

"Oh! we may succeed, if they do not get reinforcements."

"That is a chance, and a terrible one; but our lives are in God's hands," replied Bois-Rose. "Tell me, friend!" said he to Gayferos, "you probably belong to the camp of Don Estevan?"

"Do you know him, then?" said the wounded man, in a feeble voice.

"Yes; and by what chance are you so far from the camp?"

The wounded man recounted how, by Don Estevan's orders, he had set off to seek for their lost guide, and that his evil star had brought him in contact with the Indians as they were hunting the wild horses.

"What is the name of your guide?"

"Cuchillo."

Fabian and Bois-Rose glanced at each other.

"Yes," said the latter, "there is some probability that your suspicions about that white demon were correct, and that he is conducting the expedition to the Golden Valley; but, my child, if we escape these Indians, we are close to it; and once we are installed there, were they a hundred, we should succeed in defending ourselves."

This was whispered in Fabian's ear.

"One word more," said Bois-Rose to the wounded man, "and then we shall leave you to repose. How many men has Don Estevan with him?"

"Sixty."

Bois-Rose now again bathed the head of the wounded Gayferos with cold water; and the unhappy man, refreshed for the moment, and weakened by loss of blood, fell into a lethargic sleep.

"Now," continued Bois-Rose, "let us endeavour to build up a rampart which shall be a little more ball and arrow-proof than this fringe of moving leaves and reeds. Did you count how many rifles the Indians had?"

"Seven, I believe," said Pepé.

"Then ten of them are less to be feared. They cannot attack us either on the right or the left—but perhaps they have made a detour to cross the river, and are about to place us between two fires."

The side of the islet opposite the shore, on which the Indians had shown themselves, was sufficiently defended by enormous roots, bristling like *chevaux-de-frise;* but the side where the attack was probably about to recommence

was defended only by a thick row of reeds and osier-shoots.

Thanks to his great strength, Bois-Rose, aided by Pepé, succeeded in dragging from the ends of the islet, which faced the course of the stream, some large dry branches and fallen trunks of trees. A few minutes sufficed for the two skilful hunters to protect the feeble side with a rough but solid intrenchment, which would form a very good defence to the little garrison of the island.

"Do you see, Fabian?" said Bois-Rose; "you'll be as safe behind these trunks of trees as in a stone fortress. You'll be exposed only to the balls that may be fired from the tops of the trees, but I shall take care that none of these red-skins climb so high."

And quite happy at having raised a barrier between Fabian and death, he assigned him his post in the place most sheltered from the enemy.

"Did you remark," said he to Pepé, "how,

at every effort that we made to break a branch or disengage a block of wood, the island trembled to its foundation?"

"Yes," said Pepé, "one might think that it was about to be torn from its base, and follow the course of the stream."

The Canadian then cautioned his two companions to be careful of their ammunition, gave Fabian some instructions as to taking aim, pressed him to his heart, squeezed the hand of his old comrade, and then the three stationed themselves at their several posts. The surface of the river, the tops of the aspens growing on the bank, the banks themselves and the reeds, were all objects of examination for the hunters, as the night was fast coming on.

"This is the hour when the demons of darkness lay their snares," said Bois-Rose, "when these human jaguars seek for their prey. It was of them that the Scriptures spoke."

No one replied to this speech, which was uttered rather as a soliloquy.

Meanwhile, the darkness was creeping on little by little, and the bushes which grew on the bank began to assume the fantastic forms given to objects by the uncertain twilight.

The green of the trees began to look black; but habit had given to Bois-Rose and to Pepé eyes as piercing as those of the Indians themselves, and nothing, with the vigilance they were exerting, could have deceived them.

"Pepé," whispered Bois-Rose, pointing to a tuft of osiers, "does it not seem to you that that bush has changed its form and grown larger?"

"Yes; it has changed its form!"

"See, Fabian—you have the piercing sight that I had at your age; does it not appear to you that at the left-hand side of that tuft of osiers the leaves no longer look natural?"

The young man pushed the reeds on one side, and gazed for awhile attentively.

"I could swear it," said he, "but——"

He stopped, and looked in another direction.

"Well! do you see anything?"

"I see, between that willow and the aspen, about ten feet from the tuft of osiers, a bush which certainly was not there just now."

"Ah! see what it is to live far from towns—the least points of the landscape fix themselves in the memory, and become precious indications. You are born to live the life of a hunter, Fabian!"

Pepé levelled his rifle at the bush indicated by Fabian.

"Pepé understands it at once," said Bois-Rose; "he knows, like me, that the Indians have employed their time in cutting down branches to form a temporary shelter; but I think two of us at least may teach them a few stratagems that they do not yet know. Leave that bush to Fabian: it will be an easy mark for him; fire at the branches whose leaves are

beginning to wither—there is an Indian behind them. Fire in the centre, Fabian!"

The two rifles were heard simultaneously, and the false bush fell, displaying a red body behind the leaves, while the branches which had been added were convulsively agitated. All three then threw themselves on the ground, and a discharge of balls immediately flew over their heads, covering them with leaves and broken branches, while the war-cry of the Indians sounded in their ears.

"If I do not deceive myself, they are now but fifteen," said Bois-Rose, as he quitted his horizontal posture, and knelt on the ground.

"Be still," added he. "I see the leaves of an aspen tremble more than the wind alone could cause them to do. It is doubtless one of those fellows who has climbed up into the trees."

As he spoke, a bullet struck one of the trunks of which the islet was composed, and proved that he had guessed rightly.

"Wagh!" said the Canadian, "I must resort to a trick that will force him to show himself."

So saying, he took off his cap and coat, and placed them between the branches, where they could be seen.

"Now," said he, "if I were fighting a white soldier, I would place myself by the side of my coat, for he would fire at the coat; with an Indian I shall stand behind it, for he will not be deceived in the same manner, and will aim to one side of it. Lie down, Fabian and Pepé, and in a minute you shall hear a bullet whistle either to the right or the left of the mark I have set up."

As Bois-Rose said this, he knelt down behind his coat, ready to fire at the aspen.

He was not wrong in his conjectures; in a moment the balls of the Indians cut the leaves on each side of the coat, but without touching either of the three companions, who had placed themselves in a line.

"Ah," cried the Canadian, "there are whites who can fight the Indians with their own weapons; we shall presently have an enemy the less."

And saying this, he fired into the aspen, out of which the body of an Indian was seen to fall, rolling from branch to branch, like a fruit knocked from its stem.

At this feat of the Canadian, the savage howlings resounded with so much fury that it required nerves of iron not to shudder at them. Gayferos himself, whom the firing had now roused, shook off his lethargy, and murmured, in a trembling voice, "Virgen de los Dolores! Would not one say it was a band of tigers howling in the darkness? Holy Virgin! have pity on me!"

"Thank her rather," interrupted the Canadian; "the knaves might deceive a novice like you, but not an old hunter like me. You have heard the jackals of an evening, in the forest, howl and answer each other as though

there were hundreds of them, when there were but three or four. The Indians imitate the jackals; and I will answer for it there are not more than a dozen now behind those trees. Ah! if I could but get them to cross the water, not one of them should return to carry the news of their disaster."

Then, as if a sudden thought had flashed across his mind, he directed his companions to lie down on their backs—in which position they were protected by the trunks of the trees.

"We are in safety as long as we lie thus," said he, "only keep your eye on the tops of the trees; it is from these only they can reach us. Fire only if you see them climb up, but otherwise remain motionless. The knaves will not willingly go without our scalps, and must make up their minds at last to attack us."

This resolution of the hunter seemed to have been inspired by heaven, for scarcely

had they laid down before a shower of balls and arrows tore to pieces the border of reeds, and broke the branches behind which they had been kneeling a minute before. Bois-Rose pulled down his coat and hat, as though he himself had fallen, and then the most profound silence reigned in the island, after this apparently murderous fire. Cries of triumph followed this silence, and then a second discharge of bullets and arrows.

"Is not that an Indian mounting the willow?" whispered Pepé.

"Yes; but let us risk his fire without stirring; lie all of us as if we were dead. Then he will go and tell his companions that he has counted the corpses of the pale faces."

In spite of the danger incurred by this stratagem, the proposition of Bois-Rose was accepted, and each remained motionless, watching, not without anxiety, the manœuvres of the Indian. With extreme precaution the red warrior climbed from branch to branch, until

he had reached a point from which he could overlook the whole islet.

There remained just sufficient daylight to observe his movements when the foliage itself did not hide them. When he had reached the desired height, the Indian, resting on a thick branch, advanced his head with precaution. The sight of the bodies extended on the ground appeared not to surprise him, and he now openly pointed his rifle towards them. This he did several times, apparently taking aim, but not one of the hunters stirred. Then the Indian uttered a cry of triumph. "The shark takes the bait," muttered Bois-Rose.

"I shall recognize this son of a dog," rejoined Pepé, "and if I do not repay him for the anxiety he has caused me, it is because the bullet he is about to send will prevent me."

"It is the Blackbird," said Bois-Rose; "he is both brave and dexterous—lie close!"

The Indian once more took aim, and then fired; a branch knocked from a tree just above

Pepé fell upon him and hurt his forehead. He stirred no more than the dead wood against which he leaned, but said, "Rascal of a redskin, I'll pay you for this before long."

Some drops of blood fell upon the face of the Canadian.

"Is anyone wounded?" said he, with a shudder.

"A scratch, nothing more," said Pepé, "God be praised!"

Just then the Indian uttered a cry of joy, as he descended from the tree on which he had mounted, and the three friends again breathed freely.

And yet some doubt seemed to remain in the minds of the Indians, for a long and solemn silence followed the manœuvre of their chief.

The sun had now set, the short twilight had passed away, night had come on, and the moon shone on the river, yet still the Indians did not stir.

"Our scalps tempt them, but they still hesitate to come and take them," said Pepé, who was becoming very tired of doing nothing.

"Patience!" whispered Bois-Rose, "the Indians are like the vultures, that dare not attack a body until it begins to decay. We may look out for them by-and-bye. Let us resume our position behind the reeds."

The hunters again quietly knelt down and continued to watch their enemies.

Before long an Indian showed himself very cautiously, another then joined him, and both approached with increasing confidence, followed by others, until Bois-Rose counted ten in the moonlight.

"They will cross the river in file, I expect," said he. "Fabian, you fire at the first; Pepé will aim at the centre, and I at the last but one. In that way they cannot all attack together. It will be a hand-to-hand struggle, but you, Fabian, while Pepé and I wait for them, knife in hand, shall load our rifles and pass them to

us. By the memory of your mother, I forbid you to fight with these wretches."

As the Canadian uttered these words, a tall Indian entered the river, followed by nine others. All advanced with the utmost caution; they might have been taken for the shades of warriors returned from the land of spirits.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BLACKBIRD.

DEATH seemed to the eyes of the Indians to reign over the island—for the hunters held even their breath—and yet they advanced with the utmost care.

The foremost man, who was the Blackbird himself, had reached a place where the water began to be deep, as the last man was just leaving the bank. But just as Fabian was about to take aim against the chief, to the great regret of Pepé, the Blackbird, either fearful of danger, or because a ray of moonlight gleaming on the rifles told him his enemy still lived, dived suddenly under the water.

"Fire!" cried Bois-Rose, and immediately the last Indian of the file fell to rise no more, and two others appeared struggling in the water, and were quickly borne off by the stream. Pepé and Bois-Rose then threw their rifles behind them, as agreed upon, for Fabian to reload, while they themselves stood upon the bank, knives in hand.

"The Apaches are still seven," shouted Bois-Rose, in a voice of thunder, anxious to finish the struggle, and feeling all his hatred of the Indians awakened within him, "will they dare to come and take the scalps of the whites?"

But the disappearance of their chief and the death of their comrades had disconcerted the Indians; they did not fly, but they remained undecided and motionless, as black rocks bathed by the shining waters of the river.

"Can the red warriors only scalp dead bodies?" added Pepé, with a contemptuous laugh. "Are the Apaches like vultures,

who only attack the dead? Advance, then, dogs, vultures, women without courage!" shouted he, at the sight of their enemies, who were now rapidly regaining the bank. Suddenly, however, he noticed a body floating on its back, whose bright eyes showed that it was not a corpse, as the extended arms and motionless body seemed to indicate.

"Don Fabian, my rifle! there is the Blackbird pretending to be dead, and floating down the stream."

Pepé took the rifle from Fabian, and aimed at the floating body, but not a muscle stirred. The hunter lowered his rifle. "I was wrong," said he, aloud, "the white men do not, like the Indians, waste their powder on dead bodies."

The body still floated, with outspread legs and extended arms. Pepé again raised his rifle, and again lowered it. Then, when he thought that he had paid off anguish for anguish to the Indian chief, he fired, and the body floated no longer.

"Have you killed him?" asked Bois-Rose.

"No, I only wished to break his shoulder bone, that he may always have cause to remember the shudder he gave and the treason he proposed to me. If he were dead, he would still float."

"You might have done better to have killed him. But what is to be done now? I hoped to finish with these demons, and now our work is still to be done. We cannot cross the river to attack them."

"It is the best thing we can do."

"With Fabian, I cannot decide to do it, or I should be now on the bank opposite, where you know as well as I do they still are breathing their infernal vengeance."

The Spaniard shrugged his shoulders with stoical resignation.

"Doubtless," said he, "but we must decide either to fly or to stay. Carramba!" continued he, "if we two were alone we would

gain the opposite bank in a minute; the seven who are left would catch us, no doubt, but we should come out of it, as we have out of more difficult situations." It would be better than to stay here like foxes in their hole."

"I agree; but Fabian! and the unlucky scalped man, whom we cannot abandon thus to the mercy of the wretches who have already treated him so cruelly. Let us wait at least until the moon has set, and darkness comes on."

And the old man hung his head with an air of discouragement—which made a painful impression on the Spaniard—raising it only to glance anxiously at the sky, where the moon held on her ordinary course over the starry blue.

"So be it," said Pepé; "but stay! we killed first five Indians, then three—that makes eight; there should have been twelve left—why did we only count ten in the

water? Depend upon it, the Blackbird has sent the two others to seek for reinforcements."

"It is possible: to remain here or to fly are both terrible."

For some time the hunters thus continued to deliberate; meanwhile the moonbeams began to fall more obliquely, and already a part of the tops of the trees was in shadow. More than an hour had elapsed since the attempt of the Indians, and Pepé, less absorbed than Bois-Rose, was watching anxiously.

"That cursed moon will never go down," said he, "and it seems to me that I hear something like the noise of feet in the water; the buffaloes do not come down to drink at this time of night."

So saying, he rose, and leaning right and left, looked up and down the stream, but on each side extended an impenetrable veil of fog. The coolness of the American night, which succeeds the burning heat of the day,

condenses thus in thick clouds the exhalations of the ground, and of the waters heated by the sun.

"I can see nothing but fog," said he.

Little by little the vague signs died away, and the air recovered its habitual calm and silence. The moon was fast going down, and all nature seemed sleeping, when the occupants of the island started up in terror.

From both sides of the river rose shouts so piercing that the banks echoed them long after the mouths that uttered them were closed. Henceforth flight was impossible; the Indians had encompassed the island.

"The moon may go down now," cried Pepé, with rage. "Ah! with reason I feared the two absent men, and the noises that I heard; it was the Indians who were gaining the opposite bank. Who knows how many enemies we have around us now?"

"What matter," replied Bois-Rose, gloomily, "whether there are one hundred vultures to

tear our bodies, or a hundred Indians to howl round us when we are dead?"

"It is true that the number matters little in such circumstances, but it will be a day of triumph for them?"

"Are you going to sing your death song, like them who, when tied to the stake, recall the number of scalps they have taken?"

"And why not? It is a very good custom, it helps one to die like a hero, and to remember that you have lived like a man."

"Let us rather try to die like Christians," replied Bois-Rose. Then, drawing Fabian towards him, he said, "I scarcely know, my beloved child, what I had dreamed of for you; I am half-savage and half civilized, and my dreams partook of both. Sometimes I wished to restore you to the honours of this world—to your honours, your titles—and to add to them all the treasures of the Golden Valley. Then I dreamed only of the splendour of the desert, and its

majestic harmonies, which lull a man to his rest, and entrance him at his waking. But I can truly say that the dominant idea in my mind was that of never quitting you. Must that be accomplished in death? So young, so brave, so handsome, must you meet the same fate as a man who would soon be useless in the world?"

"Who would love me when you were gone?" replied Fabian, in a voice which their terrible situation deprived neither of its sweetness nor firmness. "Before I met you, the grave had closed upon all I loved, and the sole living being who could replace them was —you. What have I to regret in this world?"

"The future, my child; the future into which youth longs to plunge, like the thirsty stag into the lake."

Distant firing now interrupted the melancholy reflections of the old hunter; the Indians were attacking the camp of Don Estevan. The reader knows the result.

Suddenly they heard a voice from the bank, saying, "Let the white men open their ears!"

"It is the Blackbird again," cried Pepé. It was indeed he, supported by two Indians.

"Why should they open their ears?" answered Pepé. "The whites laugh at the menaces of the Blackbird, and despise his promises."

"Good!" said the Indian; "the whites are brave, and they will need all their bravery. The white men of the south are being attacked now; why are the men of the north not against them?"

"Because you are a bird of deleful plumage; because lions do not hunt with jackals, for jackals can only howl while the lion devours. Apply the compliment; it is a fine flower of Indian rhetoric," cried Pepé, exasperated.

"Good! the whites are like the conquered Indian, insulting his conqueror. But the eagle laughs at the words of the mocking-

bird, and it is not to him that the eagle deigns to address himself."

"To whom, then?" cried Pepé.

"To the giant his brother, the eagle of the snowy mountains, who disdains to imitate the language of other birds."

"What do you want of him?" said Bois-Rose.

"The Indian would hear the northern warrior ask for life," replied the Blackbird.

"I have a different demand to make," said the Canadian.

"I listen," replied the Indian.

"If you will swear on the honour of a warrior, and on your father's bones, that you will spare my companions' lives, I shall cross the river alone without arms, and bring you my scalp on my head. That will tempt him," added Bois-Rose.

"Are you mad, Bois-Rose?" cried Pepé.

Fabian flew towards the Canadian. "At the first step you make towards the Indian, I shall kill you," cried he.

The old hunter felt his heart melt at the sound of the two voices that he loved so much. A short silence followed, then came the answer from the bank.

"The Blackbird wishes the white man to ask for life, and he asks for death. My wish is this: let the white man of the north quit his companions, and I swear on my father's bones that his life shall be saved, but his alone; the other three must die."

Bois-Rose disdained to reply to this offer, and the Indian chief waited vainly for a refusal or an acceptance. Then he continued:—

"Until the hour of their death, the whites hear the voice of the Indian chief for the last time. My warriors surround the island and the river. Indian blood has been spilled, and must be revenged; white blood must flow. But the Indian does not wish for this blood warmed by the ardour of the combat, he wishes for it frozen by terror, impoverished

by hunger. He will take the whites living; then, when he holds them in his clutches, when they are like hungry dogs howling after a bone, he will see what men are like after fear and privation; he will make of their skin a saddle for his war-horse, and each of their scalps shall be suspended to his saddle as a trophy of vengeance. My warriors shall surround the island for fifteen days and nights, if necessary, in order to make capture of the white men."

After these terrible menaces the Indian disappeared behind the trees. But Pepé, not willing that he should believe he had intimidated them, cried as coldly as anger would permit, "Dog, who can do nothing but bark, the whites despise your vain bravados. Jackal, unclean polecat, I despise you—I—I"—but rage prevented him from saying more, and he finished off by a gesture of contempt; then with a loud laugh he sat down, satisfied at having had the last word. As for Bois-Rose,

he saw in it all only the refusal of his heroic sacrifice.

"Ah," sighed the generous old man, "I could have arranged it all; now it is too late."

The moon had gone down; the sound of distant firing had ceased, and the darkness made the three friends feel still more forcibly how easy it would have been to gain the opposite bank, carrying in their arms the wounded man. He, insensible to all that was passing, still slept heavily.

"Thus," said Pepé, first breaking silence, "we have fifteen days to live; it is true, we have not much provision, but, carramba! we shall fish for food and for amusement."

"Let us think," said Bois-Rose, "of employing usefully the hours before daylight."

"In what?"

"Parbleu! in escaping!"

"But how?"

"That is the question. You can swim, Fabian?"

"How else should I have escaped from the Salto de Agua?"

"True! I believe that fear confuses my brain. Well! it would not be impossible, perhaps, to dig a hole in the middle of this island, and to slip through this opening into the water. The night is so dark, that if the Indians do not see us throw ourselves into the water, we might gain a place some way off with safety. Stay, I shall try an experiment."

So saying, he detached, with some trouble, one of the trunks from the little island; and its knotty end looked not unlike a human head. This he placed carefully on the water, and soon it floated gently down the stream. The three friends followed its course anxiously; then, when it had disappeared, Bois-Rose said:—

"You see, a prudent swimmer might pass in the same manner; not an Indian has noticed it."

"That is true; but who knows that their eyes cannot distinguish a man from a piece of wood?" said Pepé. "Besides, we have with us a man who cannot swim."

"Who?"

The Spaniard pointed to the wounded man; who groaned in his sleep, as though his guardian angel warned him that there was a question of abandoning him to his enemies.

"What matter!" said Bois-Rose; "Is his life worth that of the last of the Medianas?"

"No," replied the Spaniard; "and I who half wanted a short time ago to abandon the poor wretch, think now it would be cowardly."

"Perhaps," added Fabian, "he has children, who would weep for their father."

"It would be a bad action, and would bring us ill-luck," added Pepé.

All the superstitious tenderness of the Canadian awoke at these words, and he said:—

"Well then, Fabian, you are a good swimmer, follow this plan: Pepé and I will stay here and guard this man, and if we die here it will be in the discharge of our duty, and with the joy of knowing you to be safe."

But Fabian shook his head.

"I care not for life without you; I shall stay," said he.

"What can be done, then?"

"Let us think," said Pepé.

But it was unluckily one of those cases in which all human resources are vain, for it was one of those desperate situations from which a higher power alone could extricate them. In vain the fog thickened and the night grew darker; the resolution not to abandon the wounded man opposed an insurmountable obstacle to their escape, and before long the fires lighted by the Indians along each bank threw a red light over the stream, and rendered this plan impracticable. Except for these fires, the most complete calm reigned, for no enemy

was visible, no human voice troubled the silence of the night. However, the fog grew more and more dense, the banks disappeared from view, and even the fires looked only like pale and indistinct lights under the shadowy outline of the trees.

END OF VOL. II.

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